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SERMONS.

BY

JOSEPH ADDISON ALEXANDER, D.D.

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XXI.

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SERMONS.

I.

Ephesians 5, 14.—Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

If we would profit by the reading of the Scriptures, we must not take partial, superficial views of them. We must not be governed too much by the form in which the truth is clothed. If that form be poetical, we must not regard the passage as mere poetry; or if parabolical, as mere parable; or if historical, as nothing more than history. In like manner it would be a serious mistake to regard the devotional parts of Scripture as mere vehicles of individual sentiment. But the error of this kind, into which we are most apt to fall, has reference to the doctrinal and hortatory parts of Scripture. Our knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible will be small, if we derive it wholly from the formal doctrinal propositions which the book contains. And on the other hand, our views of Christian duty must be limited, if they are formed exclusively upon the strictly preceptive

parts of Scripture. The truth is, that the doctrinal and practical run constantly into each other. Every doctrinal statement involves a precept, and every exhortation involves doctrinal instruction. For example, in the doctrine, that except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God, what a lesson do we learn as to our own interest and duty. What could be a stronger exhortation to the duty of seeking admittance to God's kingdom by means of the new birth? As an opposite example, take the text which I have read. It consists entirely of an exhortation with a promise to encourage the performance. And yet it is full of doctrinal instruction. While it formally does nothing more than call us to the performance of certain duties, it impliedly teaches us truths to be believed. And as truth is in order to goodness, it is vain to expect that men will practise the preceptive part which lies upon the surface, without comprehending and believing the doctrinal part which lies back of it.

In order to illustrate this whole statement, let us discriminate between the doctrinal and practical elements combined in the text, and inquire first what it calls us to believe, and then what it calls us to do. The doctrinal lessons which it calls us to believe may be reduced to two. It teaches us, first, what is our natural condition; and second, how it may be changed. Let us look at both in order.

The text impliedly describes our state by several figures, all of which are natural and intelligible. It describes it, in the first place, as a state of darkness. I read this doctrine in the last clause of the verse;

and Christ shall give thee light. If the change here spoken of was to consist in the imparting of light, then the previous condition of the soul was one of darkness. This figure is so natural and common in the Scriptures that it needs no explanation. Light in the external world is the element or medium by which we see other objects. Darkness precludes light, not by extinguishing the sense, but by rendering it useless. So spiritual darkness destroys our power of discerning spiritual objects, not by impairing the substance of the soul, nor by destroying any of its faculties, but by rendering them inefficient and unavailable. The objects are still there; and the natural powers of the soul are there; but darkness cuts off all connection between them, and therefore it is as insensible to spiritual objects, as if they had no existence, or as if itself had no capacity to see them.

This, at least, is the case just so far as the spiritual darkness reaches; but in order to present the case exactly, three gradations may be stated, three degrees of darkness, as it affects the soul and its perceptions. The first and highest is that which has been mentioned, and in which the soul has no perception at all of spiritual objects or "the things of God," which are, to it, as though they were not. The second degree is that in which it sees the objects as existing, but is blind to their distinguishing qualities and relative proportions. The third is that in which the qualities are seen, but not appreciated; they are seen to exist, but not seen to be excellent or the reverse. This, if I may use so inaccurate a phrase, is not so much a darkness of the mind as of the heart; a blindness of

the affections as to spiritual objects. Now it is not necessary, for our present purpose, to make nice distinctions as to the existence of either of these degrees of darkness in different cases. They may all co-exist in the same case, but with respect to different objects. There are some things of a spiritual and religious nature, of which the natural man may form distinct ideas, and about which he may reason, *i. e.* about their existence and their attributes. But he is no more able to perceive or feel their excellence, than a blind man to enjoy varieties of colour. Well, there are things of a still higher order which the natural man may see to be real; but he not only cannot see the absolute or comparative excellence of their attributes, he cannot see the attributes themselves. The objects are to him a confused maze without definite figures or proportions. He sees them as trees walking. And above these there are others of the highest excellence which he neither appreciates as excellent, nor recognizes as possessing an existence. He is blind to them. So far as he is affected by them, they might as well not be. And as these last are things which must be known, in order to salvation, it matters little what imperfect vision he may have of other matters. His darkness may be described as total, because it destroys his view of those things without which the sight of others avails nothing. In this sense our state by nature is a state of total darkness.

Now darkness affects only the sense of sight. A man may grope in darkness, he may feel his way, and he may judge of what he cannot see, by hearing,

smell, and taste. Such a condition is indeed inconvenient, but it does not destroy the man's perceptions. If, then, spiritual darkness is analogous to natural, though it impair the comfort of the soul by blinding its eyes, it may leave it other means of knowing that which must be known in order to salvation. But observe: a man can grope his way and use his other senses to advantage only when awake. There are somnambulists, indeed, but as a general fact, the man who contrives to live in safety, though in darkness, must be wide awake.

But alas! our text teaches us that our spiritual state is not only a state of darkness, but a state of sleep. This I infer from the command in the first clause: Awake thou that sleepest. Now sleep is more than darkness. Darkness is included in it. To him who is asleep the external world is dark. But what is there besides implied in sleep? The man who is asleep has his senses sealed; not his sight merely, but his other senses. External objects are to him as though they were not. So to the sleeping soul, all that lies beyond this life and its interests, is veiled from view. It might as well not be. But while the senses of the sleeper are suspended, his imagination is awake and active. The more insensible he is of that which really surrounds him, the more prolific is his fancy in ideal objects. Though dead to the every-day world, he is alive to an imaginary world. So powerful is the illusion, and so vivid the creations of the fancy, that he lives whole years in a single hour, a lifetime in a night. Our spiritual state is also one of dreams. The life of the natural

man is but a dream. He sees, he hears, he feels; but the objects of his hearing, sight, and feeling, are imaginary. They are either wholly fictitious, or distorted and falsified by the imagination. That the unregenerate man enjoys a certain kind of pleasure, is not more wonderful than that the dreamer has his pleasures too. That the one despises the enjoyments of religion is no more surprising than the other is unwilling to exchange the joys of sleep for the realities of waking life. In either case the judgment is perverted or suspended. Who does not know that in our dreams we form opinions and conclusions which to our waking minds appear absurd; and yet while we are dreaming, we have no suspicion that they want consistency or truth. Why should we wonder then that souls, which are asleep, form opinions so extravagant, so groundless, so preposterous, and confidently hold them, till the grace of God awakens them and shows them their own folly? Here let us learn too the absurdity of yielding our own judgments, if enlightened by the grace of God, to the contempt or opposition of the sleeping world around us. Will any sane man let his judgment in important matters of the present life be affected by the babble of one talking in his sleep.

I have named as points of similarity between natural and spiritual sleep, the inaction of the senses, the indulgence of the fancy, and the suspension of the judgment. Let me add the inactivity of the whole man, as to external things; the sorrows, joys, and business of the world around him. The natural sleeper is not more completely paralyzed for secular

concerns, than the soul asleep in sin is for the business of eternity. The existence of the sleeper is a blank in either case. This, then, is the meaning of the text, when it describes us as sunk in sleep as well as wrapped in darkness. Not only are our eyes sealed to the truth, and to our own condition, but we are the subjects of perpetual illusion. Darkness alone would be a mere negation; but a darkness full of dreams and visions is a positive infliction. It matters not that the illusions are of a pleasing nature. That can only aggravate the pain of our awaking. Did you ever forget any of the pains of real life in a delightful dream? And do you not remember the convulsive pang with which the truth rushed back upon your waking thoughts? And can you imagine that the anguish will be less when the dream of a whole lifetime is abruptly broken? Or if you know what it is to be aroused by harsh and grating noises from a pleasant dream, do you suppose that your long dream will be agreeably dissolved by the blast of the great trumpet? It is related by one of those who witnessed and experienced a late explosion, that when it occurred he was asleep, and that his first sensation was a pleasant one, as though he had been flying through the air. He opened his eyes, and he was in the sea! May there not be something analogous to this in the sensations of the sinner, who dies with his soul asleep, and soars, as he imagines, towards the skies, but instantaneously awakes amidst the roar of tempests and the lash of waves, upon the ocean of God's wrath? The Lord preserve us all from such a waking, yet it is to this that our condition tends—it

is a state of darkness and a state of sleep. According to the ancients, Sleep is the brother of Death; and the resemblance is too obvious to be overlooked.

In all the negative attributes of sleep which have been mentioned, death resembles it. In death the senses are effectually sealed; the functions of the judgment are suspended, and the active powers of the man are in abeyance. It is frequently not easy to distinguish sleep from death. The repose is so profound, the frame so motionless, that one who looks upon it feels that Sleep is indeed the brother of Death. But I need not say that death is more than sleep. And wherein is the difference? He that sleeps may wake again, and the suspension of his senses and his judgment may be terminated by his simply starting out of sleep. But in death, the intellectual and bodily inaction are continuous and permanent. There have been instances in which the body washed and dressed for burial, has amazed its watchers, by resuming its vitality; but in such cases the death was an apparent one. The man once dead never starts again to life by a convulsive effort. As the tree falls, so it lies.

In these two points Death differs from his brother; the suspension of the faculties is permanent, and there is no power of self-resuscitation. Now the text teaches that the soul by nature is not only dark and asleep, but dead. It says not only, "Awake thou that sleepest!" but, "Arise from the dead!" And in every point that has been mentioned, this death of the soul is like that of the body. It is sleep rendered permanent, as to the suspension of our ordinary functions;

it is a sleep too sound to be disturbed, a sleep from which no one rises of himself, refreshed in feeling and renewed in strength. Even with respect to dreams death may be described as a continued sleep.

> "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause."

But there is one distinction between sleep and death, whether natural or spiritual, that must not be overlooked. In natural sleep, although the senses are inactive, and the judgment in abeyance, and the whole man dead as to external things, the body is still under the conservative dominion of the principle of life. That mysterious power holds the elements of humanity in healthful combination, and the man still lives. But in the sleep of death, this antiseptic energy is gone; the harmonious combination is dissolved; the parts all tend to dissolution, and the whole frame hastens to putrescence. This is a subject too familiar and too painful to be dwelt upon at large. It is sufficient to observe that on this point also the analogy holds good. The spiritual death to which we are all heirs, is something more than a negation of activity. It might be said of the soul, as the disciples said of Lazarus: If he sleeps he shall do well: he may arise from this lethargic state to life and action. But in spiritual death there is a constant tendency to moral dissolution; or rather, since this tendency begins to show itself as soon as we are born, it is forever growing, the majority of men exhibit not a mere approach to it, but actual putrefaction. "They

are altogether become filthy." If our eyes could be unsealed and disabused of all illusion, we should see ourselves to be by nature inmates of a charnel-house, surrounded by the shapeless remnants of dissolved humanity, inhaling every moment the dank atmosphere of death, and feeling in our own frames the first gnawings of the worm that breeds corruption. Yes, our state by nature is not only one of sleep, but one of death and putrefaction.

This might seem to be all; but we must take another step, and one of great importance. If men are convinced merely that their condition is a wretched and degraded one, they are prone to feel a sort of satisfaction in the fact, as if their misery entitled them to pity and respect. This absurd and pernicious feeling springs entirely from the false assumption that our wretched state by nature is a blameless one; that our depravity is not so much our fault as our misfortune. Hence you will hear men converse fluently about their own corrupt and fallen state, who would repel with rage any specific charge involving moral guilt. To do away this false impression, we have only to observe that, according to our text, the state of man by nature is not alone one of darkness, sleep, and death, but one of guilt. This is implied in the whole exhortation of the text. The sleeper is evidently called on to awake, as that which he was bound to do; and the dead man is summoned to arise, as though he had no right to remain in that condition. Every exhortation to perform a duty involves a condemnation of its neglect as sinful.

But the sinfulness of that estate whereinto we are

fallen, is evinced not merely by the form of speech which the apostle uses. It is also apparent from the nature of the case. The will of God is to us the rule of right, and every departure of our will from his, is a departure from strict rectitude, and therefore sin. Now the spiritual darkness, sleep, and death before described, are nothing more than figurative statements of our deadly alienation from the love of God, the defection of our will from his, and consequently our exceeding sinfulness. There is no true test of right and wrong to which we can refer ourselves, that will not show our natural condition to be one of awful guilt as well as misery.

And if a state of guilt, it is a state of danger. For guilt is our exposure to the wrath of God as a consequence of sin. It may be said, however, that this statement is at variance with the figurative language of the text; for though a state of darkness or of sleep may be dangerous, a state of death can scarcely be so called. The evils of this life terminate in death, which cannot therefore be called dangerous. But danger may be predicated properly of all the situations which are figuratively set forth in the text, because they all admit of increase and progressive aggravation. Dark as the soul is, it may yet be darker. It admits, as we have seen, of different gradations. To some objects we are totally blind. Others we see imperfectly, and others still distinctly, but without a just appreciation of their real attributes. Now, by continuance in a state of darkness, our perceptions of this last class may become as faint as those of the preceding; and ultimately both degrees of twi-

light may be merged in midnight darkness; a darkness which not only destroys vision, but which may be felt, deadening the senses and benumbing all the faculties. There is something dreadful in the thought of such a change, even in relation to the bodily perceptions. To see one source of reflected light after another quenched, and at last to witness the extinction of the sun itself, and the annihilation of all light, is terrible enough. But not so terrible in truth as the removal of all spiritual light, and the gradual advance of darkness, till, like a funeral pall, it overspreads the universe, confounding all distinctions, and commingling all objects in the chaos of a night that has no twilight and no morning. Oh, it is one thing to imagine such a state of things, while actually in possession of a thousand radiating lustrous points, imparting the reflected light of heaven to our souls; but quite another thing to see them all grow dark in quick succession, and to feel the darkness creeping to our inmost souls.

If such a change be possible, then surely a state of spiritual darkness is a state of danger. And is not spiritual sleep likewise a state of danger? May not that sleep become sounder and sounder, and the sleeper more and more insensible of all surrounding objects? May not the chances of his ever waking become less and less, until the case is desperate? Have you not heard of sick men who have fallen, to appearance, into sweet and gentle slumber, the supposed precursor of returning health, and never waked again? Oh, there are doubtless many spiritual invalids who come to a like end. After a life of irreligion and of

vice, they experience a few pangs of compunction, and subside into a state of calm quiescence, equally free from the excesses of gross sin, and the positive exercises of a renewed heart. In this soft slumber they remain amidst the thunders of the law and the gospel, confident of their own salvation, and unmoved by what is said to men as sinners. And in this somnolent condition they remain, until the taking of rest in sleep is followed by the sleep of death. No waking interval seems to show them their true situation, and they are not undeceived until the first flash of eternal daylight forces their eyes open.

Is not spiritual sleep a state of danger then? All this will be readily conceded, but the question still recurs: how can death be properly a state of danger? A man in the dark may be exposed to peril on the margin of a precipice, and so may he who is asleep upon the top of a mast; for both are exposed to sudden death. But when already dead, where is the danger? Is not death a state of safety as to temporal perils? The answer to this question involves a striking difference between natural and spiritual death. The death of the body, as it simply puts an end to all the vital functions, is an absolute and changeless state, admitting no gradations; whereas spiritual death is something positive, and constantly progressive. The man who died yesterday is just as dead to-day as he will be to-morrow. But the dead soul becomes more dead every day and every hour. The process of corruption never ceases, and, if the soul continues dead, never will cease. The worm that feeds upon the carcass of the dead soul is a worm that never dies, and the fire

that decomposes it is never quenched. What we call spiritual death in this world sinks from one degree of putrefaction to another, till it gets beyond the reach, not only of restorative, but of embalming processes, until it is resolved into eternal death. And even in that lowest pit there is a lower pit of putrefaction and decay, opening one beneath another into that abyss from which reason and imagination shrink with equal horror. Yes, the first is to the second death as a mere point of time to all eternity. The soul that dies once, dies forever, nay is forever dying; not as in the first death with an agony of moments or of hours in its duration, but with a throe of anguish which shall blend with all the dying soul's sensations through eternity. And oh, what an eternity! each thought a pang, and every respiration a mere dying gasp! This is the second death: and will you say that spiritual death, which tends to this, is not a state of danger?

If it be true that our natural state is one of darkness, sleep, death, guilt, and danger, no one who really believes it to be so, can fail to be aroused to the necessity of doing something to obtain deliverance. The real ground of men's indifference to this matter is their unbelief. They do not really believe what they are told as to their state by nature. Where this faith really exists, it shows itself in anxious fears, if not in active efforts. And the soul's first impulse is, to break the spell which binds it, by its own strength. It resolves that the darkness shall be light, that the sleep of sin shall be disturbed, and that there shall be a resurrection from the death of sin; its guilt shall be

atoned for, and its dangers all escaped. Such resolutions always have the same result—a total failure in the object aimed at, and an aggravation of the evils to be remedied. To save you from the pain of a severe disappointment, let me remind you, that according to our text, the state of man by nature is not only one of darkness, and sleep, and death, and guilt, and danger, but of helplessness. I say, according to the text, for although this doctrine is not taught explicitly, I read it in the promise added to the exhortation, "Christ shall give thee light." It might, indeed, at first sight, seem, as if our compliance with the exhortation were a condition of the promise which is added. And so indeed it is, but like other conditions in the system of free grace, it is dependent upon that which seems dependent upon it. Repentance and faith are conditions of salvation; but the author of our salvation is the giver of repentance, the author and finisher of our faith. It seems as if God, in divine condescension to the feelings of poor sinners, had thought fit to clothe his own gratuitous bestowments in the guise of acts to be performed by us. He forgives us freely if we repent and believe, but we can just as well make expiation for our sins, as repent and believe without divine assistance. It is as if a father should offer to forgive his child's offence, on condition that he pay a certain sum, and should then produce the sum required from his own purse. When the text says, therefore, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," the analogy of gospel truth constrains us to believe, that so the light which is promised in the last clause

is the means, the only means, by which the exhortation can be possibly complied with.

Nor is it only from the text that this appears. It results from the very nature of the state in question. Would it not have been a bitter irony to call upon the Egyptians to strike light out of the palpable obscurity in which they were involved? Would it not have been worse than irony to wait till Lazarus should raise himself? Above all, would you tantalize the breaker of God's holy law by promises of pardon, on condition of his perfect obedience for the future, and satisfactory atonement for the past? Does he not know that every effort for the expiation of his guilt adds something to its depth and its enormity? That having his face naturally turned from God, the further he proceeds, the more remote he is from God, and every impulse which he feels, instead of bringing his soul nearer, drives it further from the centre of perfection? What a condition! If it were possible to sit still and do nothing, we should surely perish through our own neglect. And if we exercise our strength, we only stir up a centrifugal impetus which drives us to perdition! Surely this is helplessness in the highest sense. And I appeal to any one who ever was awakened to a sense of sin and the desire of salvation, whether his own heart does not respond to my description. If it does, we have experimental confirmation of the scriptural doctrine, that our state by nature is not only miserable, dangerous, and guilty, but pre-eminently helpless.

But will not this doctrine tend to paralyze the efforts of the sinner for salvation? And what then?

The more completely his self-righteous strength is paralyzed, the better. No man can trust God and himself at once. Your self-reliance must be destroyed, or it will destroy you. But if, by a paralysis of effort, be intended a stagnation of feeling, and indifference to danger, I reply that this doctrine has no tendency to breed it. Suppose it should be suddenly announced to this assembly that a deadly malady had just appeared, and had begun to sweep off thousands in its course; and that the only possibility of safety depended on the use of a specific remedy, simple and easy in its application, and already within the reach of every individual, who had nothing to do at any moment but to use it, and infallibly secure himself against infection. And suppose that, while your minds were resting on this last assurance, it should be authoritatively contradicted, and the fact announced, with evidence not to be gainsaid, that this specific, simple and infallibly successful, was beyond the reach of every person present, and could only be applied by a superior power. I put it to yourselves, which of these statements would produce security, and which alarm? Which would lead you to fold your hands in indolent indifference, and which would rouse you to an agonizing struggle for the means of safety? I speak as unto wise men: judge ye what I say. Oh, my friends, if there is any cure for spiritual sloth and false security, it is a heartfelt faith in the necessity of superhuman help. The man who makes his helplessness a pretext for continuance in sin, whatever he may say, does not really believe that he is helpless. No man believes it till he knows it by experience.

The firmest believers in man's plenary ability, are men whose hearts are hard through the deceitfulness of sin. Those, on the contrary, who have been taught to fathom the abyss of their own hearts, and who know what it is to have leaned upon the reed of their own strength until it pierced them, will be forward to acknowledge that our state of nature is not only one of darkness, sleep, death, guilt, and danger, but of utter helplessness.

Here we may pause in our enumeration. Each item in the catalogue has made our state by nature more degraded and alarming, and we now have reached a point, beyond which we need not, and indeed cannot advance. Darkness is bad enough, but its perils may be shunned by men awake. But we are also asleep; and sleep, though it suspends our powers, is a transient state. But alas! our sleep is the sleep of death. Yet even in death some men take pleasure, as a state admitting of no further change. But our death is progressive, and therefore far more dangerous than any state in life. Yet even here we might take refuge in the consciousness of our own innocence, and draw a kind of desperate consolation from the proud thought that we have not brought this ruin on ourselves. But even this poor consolation is snatched from us. We are guilty! we are guilty! This puts an end to all self-pleading, and impels us to escape from a condition which is equally miserable, dangerous, and guilty. But even here we are encountered by a last conviction. We are helpless! we are helpless! This is the death-blow to our hopes, and we despair. Yes, despair may be described as

the conclusion to which we are conducted by the text. Not absolute despair, but that despair which is essential to salvation. For there is salvation, even from this lowest depth to which we have descended. The text teaches us not only what our state by nature is, but how it may be changed. Our bane and antidote are both before us. And what is this great remedy? Hear the answer of the text: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Light, light is the specific for our case. And as light is the opposite of darkness, the description before given of our spiritual darkness, will teach us what is signified by spiritual light, and what are its effects upon the soul.

In the first place, it dispels that blindness of the heart and the affections, which disables us from seeing the true qualities of spiritual objects. That which before seemed repulsive, becomes lovely: that which was mean, is glorious. That which was pleasing or indifferent, is now seen to be loathsome. The beauty of holiness and the ugliness of sin, are now revealed in their true colours. Moral and spiritual objects which before were undefined and indistinct, are now seen clearly, and invested with their true proportions. Things which, through the mist of sin, were magnified, distorted, and confused, fall at once into their natural position and their real size. Nor is this all. The light which beams upon us, not only rectifies our views of what we saw before, but shows us what we never saw. We are like the prophet's servant, who imagined that his master and himself were left alone, until his eyes were opened, and he saw the mountain

to be filled with chariots, and horses of fire. Have you ever read, or heard, of the effect produced upon the feelings by the sudden restoration of the sight? Those objects which to us are too familiar to affect us, are to the blind man full of glory. In the moment of his restoration, a whole lifetime of enjoyment seems to be concentrated. But what are these sensations to the feelings of the soul when the scales fall from its eyes, and the curtain is withdrawn from the spiritual world, and the intense light of divine illumination, with gradual dawn, or sudden flash, lights up the amphitheatre by which we are surrounded, and shows us that, instead of standing by ourselves in a contracted circle, we are a spectacle to angels and to devils, and spectators of a universe!

Light, then, is the remedy; but how shall we obtain it? We are still driven back upon our helplessness. We see that light we must have, but we see not how it can be kindled by us. Here the text teaches us another lesson. It teaches us not only that we must have light, but that it must be given to us. Christ shall *give* thee light. If it comes at all it comes as a free gift. This harmonizes fully with the sense of our helplessness, and indeed confirms it. Think not that I lay too much stress upon this incidental form of speech. This circumstance I hold to be essential to the doctrine. It matters not how sensible we may be of the need of light, nor how intensely we may long for it, unless we know that it can only come to us by being *given*. Thousands come short of everlasting life, because they trust for light in sparks of their own kindling. The light which we

need, is not from any earthly luminary. It is not from any twinkling star, revolving planet, or erratic comet. It is from the sun, the sun of righteousness. And where is he? In what part of the firmament is his tabernacle set?

This is the last question answered by the text. It not only shows us that we must have light, and that this light must be given to us by another, but it shows us who can give it—who alone can give it. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and *Christ* shall give thee light." Brethren, from whatever point you set out when you trace the gospel method of salvation, if you follow the Scriptures, you will always come to Christ. And that way of salvation which conducts to any other point, is not the way for us. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. This world, to the believer, is a dark, perplexing labyrinth, and in its mazes he would lose himself forever, were it not that ever and anon, at certain turnings in the crooked path, he gets a glimpse of Calvary. These glimpses may be transitory, but they feed his hopes, and often unexpectedly return to cheer his drooping spirits. Sometimes he is ready to despair of his escape, and to lie down in the darkness of the labyrinth and die. But as he forms the resolution, an unlooked-for turn presents a distant prospect, and beyond all other objects and above them, he discerns the cross and Christ upon it. Look to Christ, then! look to him for light to dissipate your darkness—to arouse you from your sleep, and to raise you from the dead; for though these figures are not carried out by the apostle, he obviously

means that the light here promised is to be a cure, not only for our darkness, but our sleep and death. And, indeed, the perception and enjoyment of light, implies that we are living and awake. If, then, you would have this sovereign remedy for all your evils, look to Christ! Perhaps you have already looked unto him and been lightened. Oh, then, look on, look always; for it is not enough to have looked once. The believer's face must be fixed continually on this source of light, and fastened there forever. Have you not had your hours of darkness, nay, your days, weeks, months and years of darkness, even since you obtained light from Christ? Ah, it was when you turned away your steadfast gaze from the pillar of fire which went before you, that it became to you a pillar of cloud. To all who are now in darkness, I hold up the only source of spiritual light; and in the ears of every one slumbering at ease within the Church of God, I cry aloud, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!"

But its exhortation is not only or chiefly to the believer who is wrapped in darkness. Its voice is still louder to the soul asleep in sin, dead in trespasses and sins, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!" And oh, remember that you cannot shut your eyes upon this light without an aggravation of your future wretchedness—without adding a deeper shade of blackness to the darkness of your grave. It is said, that in some of the great light-houses built on rocks lying mostly under water, the brightness of the lantern

attracts multitudes of sea-birds, which dart headlong towards it, like the moth into the candle, and are violently dashed back dead into the sea. And oh, is it not a fearful thought that the salvation of the gospel, that the cross of Christ itself, may be a living, yet not a saving sight—that souls may be attracted by it only to perdition? But that same radiant lantern which sheds its saving beams upon the souls of the elect, shines no less brightly upon those that perish. But, alas! instead of using its divine light to escape the wrath to come, they only dash against it with insane hostility, and fall back stunned into the dark abyss which washes its foundations. God forbid that you or I should die so terrible a death, and be lighted to perdition by that very blaze which might have guided us to glory.

II.

Mark 14, 41.—Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

The Bible is full of exhortations to awake; but a command to sleep is rare and paradoxical; so much so, that many interpreters have chosen to regard this sentence as a question: Do you still sleep, and take your rest? you have slept enough: the hour is come, behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. This construction of the passage, though it yields a good sense, is less consistent with the form of the original than the common version, which is supported by a great majority of the ablest critics. Viewing it therefore as an exhortation, or at least a permission, I repeat that it is something rare and paradoxical. And this first impression is increased by the reason which is given for the exhortation. Had the language been, sleep on, and take your rest, my hour is not yet come, it would have been at once intelligible: but it is, sleep on and take your rest, the hour is come; and as if to leave no doubt that "the hour" was that mysterious hour of darkness, towards which the voice of prophecy and the finger of provi-

dence had been so long pointing with incessant premonition, "behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." Was there ever a command so strange, supported by a reason so much stranger? I call your attention to this singularity, because we are too apt to overlook these striking points in the familiar Scriptures, and because I see wrapped up in these remarkable expressions, a rich volume of instruction to myself and to my hearers. To unroll it, and decipher at least some of its most solemn lessons, is my present purpose.

From the very nature of the case, however, it is not by metaphysical or logical analysis that this leaf in the book of life is to be rendered legible. So far from it, that I design to call in the aid of your imaginations in pursuing my design. I know that the very name of this unruly power is cast out as evil by many sincere Christians. But I also know that almost every page of Scripture calls for its due exercise: that neither prophecies nor parables can do their office without its assistance; that even those who dread it as an instrument of evil, habitually use it as an instrument of good; and that much of our indifference to the word of God arises from the want of a chastened imagination giving colour and vitality to what we read. But while I thus call in imagination to my aid, it is with no romantic or theatrical design. It is not to invent unreal forms, but to call up before us those already in existence. The materials upon which she is to work are simple facts recorded in God's word, and rendered still more tangible and real, to our apprehension, by the minutiæ of time and place.

On the east side of Jerusalem, between the city and the Mount of Olives, flows a stream called Kedron. Beyond this, at the very foot of Olivet, there is a small enclosure, with a low stone wall, containing a very few ancient olive-trees, the offspring and successors of an elder race. This place is now called Jesmaniah, but according to a tradition of the country, which there seems to be no reason to discredit, it was called, in ancient times, Gethsemane. Into this enclosure, on a Thursday night, there entered four men from the Mount of Olives. I cannot describe their persons, but I know their countenances must have been dejected, for their hearts were full of sorrow. And on the heart of one among the number there rested, at that hour, a load of grief, compared with which the aggregated sorrows of the human family, before and since, are nothing. Yes, if we could collect the tears of widowed wives, and childless mothers, and forsaken orphans, the cries of every battle-field, the groans of every hospital, the shrieks of every torture-room, the unheard sobs which have been stifled in the prison house, and all those deeper agonies which never find expression—they would be as nothing to the single pang which wrung a single heart, upon that awful night.

Here, if we chose, we might indulge imagination, without any fear that our conceptions would transcend the truth, or that the longest line that we could heave would ever reach the bottom of that deep, deep sea of sorrow. But such indulgence would be no less vain than painful. Let us rather in imagination follow the four men, till their forms are almost lost

among the olive-trees. Three of them sit upon the ground, while the fourth passes on into a deeper shade and a remoter solitude. Do you know him, Christian brethren? Oh, I believe that if that blessed face should now appear among us, as it then looked in Gethsemane, we all should know it. I am aware that many wild imaginations have been cherished, and that painters and poets have exhausted their invention in conjectural embellishments. But if that living countenance could now be set before us, I believe that in its aspect of benignant sadness, in the lines of sinless sorrow which had marred its surface, we could read the name of its possessor no less clearly than in Pilate's superscription on the cross. It was the Son of Man. His companions were the sons of men, but he the Son of Man. He sustained a relation to humanity itself, for in its coarse integuments his deity was shrouded. The Son of God, by a voluntary act, became the Son of Man, and from the bosom of the Father, where he dwelt before the world was, took up his abode in the bosom of our fallen and unhappy race. We cannot pierce the mystery of that transition, nor explain how the divinity was held in abeyance, that humanity might exercise its finite powers; but we know that from the moment of that union, there arose an identity of interest and feeling which shall never end; that no sooner had the Son of God become the Son of Man, than there began to gush, within his human heart, a well-spring of sympathy which angels cannot know; that the pains of his infancy were pains of human infirmity, that the tears of his maturity were drops of human sorrow,

that the sins for which he suffered were the sins of humankind, that he stood in our place not only as our sacrifice, but also as our sympathetic fellow-man, not only on the cross, but in the lingering crucifixion of a life of sorrow, from the stable in Bethlehem, where we find him first, to the olives of Gethsemane, where we see him now.

And in what position? Prostrate on the ground. See that blessed brow in contact with the cold damp earth. See the convulsive agitation of the frame; and though the grief, which it betokens, lies too deep for tears, see the sweat, like drops of blood, streaming out of every pore. Sons and daughters of men, it is the Son of Man; it is the burden of humanity that crushes his unspotted heart; it is the heart's blood of our race that oozes from him; it is the Son of Man in anguish for mankind. I need not ask you to recall the words he uttered; the vocal anguish of a broken heart; but I beseech you to imagine that you see him rising, not refreshed, as we might be, by such a burst of feeling, but, with that load upon his heart still undiminished, see him come back to his friends, whom he had left, as if for sympathy. And does he find them weeping? or engaged in sad discourse, or musing in sad silence? No, he finds them sleeping! How does he treat neglect so shameful? He arouses them, but gently, with this mild expostulation: "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" He goes again: he falls again upon the ground: he repeats that prayer which we ought never to repeat without profound emotion: he returns to his companions, and again they are asleep. He utters no se-

vere rebuke, nor even a complaint, except by asking as before, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" He goes again, and for the last time, to his place of prayer: he prays again: and with that prayer unanswered, his distress unmitigated, he comes back to his friends, and they are sleeping! Does he spurn them? Does he rouse them by contemptuous reproof? Or does he leave them in anger to their own ignoble slumbers? He does neither.

The deportment of the Son of Man, on that occasion, has a transcendent, a divine sublimity, which no imagination could invent or heighten. No exhibition of Almighty wrath, however grand, though executed by a legion of angels armed with lightning, tempest, and the winds of heaven, could have invested him with such a glory, as the air of serene sorrow with which he at once rebukes, forgives, and warns them of their danger. "Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." And as he speaks, the glare of torch-light is perceived among the olive-trees, and the betrayer comes. You know what follows: you know what went before: I need neither ask nor tell you who the three men were. I need not tell you that among the number was the same bold spirit who, a little while before, had almost sworn, that though all men should forsake him, he would follow him to death, and who, a little after, actually swore that he had never known the man. I need not tell you, that another of the number was the man who leaned upon his Master's bosom, and was called his friend. You know the history, and I shall

leave it to your private meditation. Do not neglect it. This is surely no unworthy theme for your reflections. I am afraid that it is not a common one. I am afraid that even Christians may grow weary of their Saviour's passion. I am afraid that there are men, and Christian men, who can allow themselves the pitiable luxury of weeping over fiction, but who have no tears to shed with Jesus in Gethsemane. They regard it as a waste of time to dwell upon the circumstantial statements of the gospel, which cannot be reduced to abstract, systematic form. Or, at best, they are contented with a cold, dry knowledge of the facts related. They do not regard it as a matter of feeling: they would be ashamed to do so. I speak the experience of some who hear me. But ought this so to be? We must go back to the simple faith and feelings of our childhood. We must, at least in this respect, become little children. Those same imaginations, which have so often been the ministers of sin, must be used for better purposes. By their aid we must stand on Olivet and Gethsemane, mix with the rabble which surrounds the master, hear the deep imprecation of the Roman soldier, and the louder curses of the Jewish mob; follow to the house of the High Priest and the Pretorium; look at the false Procurator as he dooms the innocent, and vainly tries to wash the blood away with water. But I need not go further.

Fix your thoughts, I pray you, on these scenes as real scenes, and try to see and hear as if the sights and sounds were present to your senses. Having so done, let us gather from this night scene in Geth-

semane the lessons which it teaches for our own instruction. That it teaches such lessons is not the less true, because the external circumstances of the case recorded are entirely different from our own. That which renders the narratives of Holy Writ instructive, is not identity of outward situation, but analogy of motive and of moral relations. The same guilt may be incurred by us as by the twelve apostles, and in these ends of the earth as well as in Jerusalem. Neither sloth nor treachery derives its moral quality from time or place. In further illustration of this statement, and in application of the text, let me call your attention to a few thoughts which it has suggested.

I. The first is, that the Son of Man may even now be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Men are apt to imagine, that had they lived in the time of Christ, they would not thus and thus have treated him. This is, for the most part, mere illusion. They who hate Christ now, would have hated him then. They who despise him unseen, would have spurned him to his face. They who maltreat his members, would have persecuted him. This is a test proposed by Christ himself. That which is done to the humblest of his followers, as such, is done to him. The interests of Christ's church, are the interests of Christ. The enemies of Christ's church, are the enemies of Christ. Even in our own day Christ may be betrayed. He may be betrayed by his own disciples. He may be betrayed with a kiss. For such treason the ungodly world is waiting. There are always sinners to receive him at the traitor's hands and pay the traitor's wages.

He can no longer be betrayed by the delivery of his person into hostile hands. But the disposition to sur render him to enemies may still exist: a disposition to procure the favour of the world at his expense. In short, the same state of feeling may now operate in various directions, and in various forms, which, if the Saviour were now present upon earth, would cause him to be first forsaken, then betrayed.

In this sense, for example, it may well be said that the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners, when the truth respecting him is given up to errorists, or cavillers, or infidels; when his divinity is called in question; when his eternal Sonship is degraded or denied; when the sinless perfection of his human nature is tainted by the breath of dubious speculation; when his atonement is disfigured and perverted; when the value of his cross and bloody passion is depreciated; when his place in the system of free grace is taken from him and bestowed on something else; when the purchase of his agonies is made to be the purchase of our own good works; when faith in him, as a means of salvation, is exchanged for mere submission to the government of God; when his present existence, as a man, is forgotten; when his personal presence, as a God, is overlooked; when his exaltation and his future coming are lost sight of by his people. By conceding so much to the unbeliever, we betray the Saviour to him to be buffeted and spit upon.

To mention only one other example: Christ is betrayed into the hands of sinners, when his gospel is perverted, his example dishonoured, and him-

self represented as the minister of sin. The honour of the Saviour is in some sense committed to the care of his disciples; and this sacred trust is shamefully betrayed, when they give the world occasion, in despising them, to treat their master with contempt. O Christian! have you ever thought, that every inconsistent and unworthy act of yours is one step towards betraying Him whom you profess to love? And if, while you thus habitually act, you hold fast your profession, it is only adding the betrayer's kiss to the betrayer's perfidy. My first remark, then, is that even now, the Son of Man may be betrayed into the hands of sinners. And let me add, that there are times when such a disposition shows itself in more than common strength; when, through the abounding of temptation and iniquity, the faith of multitudes is sorely tried; and after the experiment is finished, it appears, that many, whose profession was as fair as that of Judas, have like Judas gone to their own place, and that others whose pretensions were as high as those of Peter, have like him denied their Master, and then gone out and wept bitterly. For such times, when the Saviour or his cause are in danger from betrayers, it behoves us all, my friends, to stand prepared.

II. Another thought which I suggest, is, that when the cause of Christ is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, his disciples are to watch, to watch unto prayer, lest they enter into temptation. This is incumbent upon all disciples, but especially on some. And among those there is many a bold, self-trusting Peter, and many a Boanerges. Those who are office-bearers in the Church, are the honoured

but responsible companions of their Master in the day of trial. He asks not for the exertion of their strength in his behalf. He asks not for their sympathy; he asks not for their prayers; but he does demand their vigilance. When he looks upon the purchase of his blood, spoiled and ravaged by the enemy; his little flock pursued and torn by wolves; his vineyard spoiled and trodden by wild beasts; the great Intercessor pours out his own cries and tears before the Father, and although he says no more, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," he does say, and to you, my brethren, "Tarry ye here and watch with me."

III. Another thought, and that a melancholy one, is, that when Christ's disciples are thus left to watch, while he is interceding with the Father, they too often fall asleep. Some, in the touching language of the gospel, may be "sleeping for sorrow." But oh, how many others sleep for sloth and sheer indifference. And if any sleep for sorrow, they do wrong. For when our Saviour found his chosen friends asleep upon their post, he aroused them and reproached them with that mild expostulation, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" He said, indeed, as if to extenuate their guilt, that the spirit was willing though the flesh was weak. But even admitting what is commonly supposed, that flesh and spirit here mean soul and body, it does not follow that their slumber was excusable. Christ would not repeatedly have roused them from an innocent and necessary slumber. Much less was it excusable, if, as some excellent interpreters have thought, spirit here means the better principle, the new heart, and flesh the remnant of in-

dwelling sin. If this be so, it was hardness of heart and spiritual sloth that made them sleep for sorrow. Oh my brethren, if your hearts are full of sorrow, because men make void God's law, it is no time for you to sleep! The Church, Christ's weeping bride, and the dying souls of men, are at your pillow, shrieking in your ears, like the shipmaster in the ears of Jonah: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."

IV. But alas! this warning voice is often heard in vain. Amidst a world lying in wickedness, amidst the untold miseries produced by sin, amidst the dying agonies of unsaved souls as they go down to their perdition, amidst the fierce attacks of open enemies upon the Son of Man, and the devices of false followers to betray him to those enemies; his friends, his chosen friends, sleep on. Yes, even those who were the loudest in profession, and the boldest in defiance, when the danger was far off, are found asleep when it approaches. And that sleep would prove to be the sleep of death, if we had not an High Priest who can be touched with the sense of our infirmities, and when he sees us thus asleep, comes near and rouses us. Dear friends, there may be some before me now, who, though sincere believers, have been overcome by sleep. Your senses and your intellects may be awake, your conscience has its fitful starts and intervals of wakefulness, when scared out of its slumbers by terrific dreams. But your affections are asleep. Your love to Christ, your dread of sin, your hope of heaven, your abstraction from this world, your taste

for spiritual food, your zeal for God, your charity—all these are exercises which you have experienced; but alas, they are but "shadows, not substantial things;" the ghosts of past experience, the echo of hushed voices: you hear the gospel, but it is like the drowsy lull of distant waters, making sleep more sound; you see its light, but with your eyelids closed, and so subdued its splendour, that it only soothes the sense and deepens its repose. You feel the breathings of the Spirit, but so gently, that they only add illusion to your dreams. Is it not so? No wonder, then, that your religion is a visionary and ideal thing: I do not mean that it has no reality, but that its outward actings are suspended, and its power wasted in conceptions and imaginations never to be realized.

If this is your experience, I appeal to you, and ask you whether even in this dreamy state, you have not felt the gentle hand of Christ at times upon you? Has not the most slothful and obdurate of us all, the most absorbed in worldly cares and pleasures, sometimes, in his calmer and more serious moments, felt that mild but potent pressure? Oh, is there one of us so given up of God, so forgotten of the Saviour, as to be left to slumber with the blaze of the betrayer's touch upon his very eyelids? God forbid! No, there is not a man or woman here to-night, believing, but asleep, who has not once and again been roused, in one form or another, by the Son of Man himself. Do you doubt it? Let me aid your recollection by a few suggestions. Have you not had your personal afflictions? Has not your house been visited by sick-

ness? Are there no chasms at your table or your fireside? Are there no shadows on the last leaves of your history, no doubts, no darkness, no perplexity, no pain of mind or body, no disgrace, no losses? And do you wonder at these hard, these unkind strokes of the Redeemer's hand? O sleeping Christian, he is but touching you to save you from perdition. And if the noise of this world would but cease to fill your ears, you would hear the injured but forgiving Saviour, saying in that same sad gentle voice, with which he said to Peter, James, and John, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

But it is not only in personal afflictions that the Saviour rouses you. Have you not felt his hand in public trials? Have you not felt it in the trials of the Church? Have you not felt it in the creeping growth of error, in the strife of tongues, and in the lacerating schism? Have you not felt it in the abounding of iniquity, and in the waxing cold of many a burning heart? Have you not felt it in the growth of a censorious, harsh, and bitter spirit, and the exchange of kindly charities for ostentatious righteousness? Have you not felt it in the decay of Christian knowledge, in the prevalence of shallow, superficial Christianity, and in the consequent triumph of fanaticism? Have you not felt it in the shock of revolution, threatening the foundations of society itself? Have you not felt it in the leanness of your own souls, and in the barrenness of your Master's vineyard? And in each and all of these successive visitations, can you not hear the accents of the Son of Man, gently reproaching your long spiritual slum-

ber, as the cause of all these evils? Can you not hear him saying, even to yourselves, as he said to his disciples, with a bursting heart, that night, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

But it is not merely in afflictions and in public trials that he thus accosts us. If you have not seen him in the fire of fanaticism, if you have not felt him in the earthquake of commotion, if you have not heard him in the whirlwind of intestine strife, you may have heard him in the still small voice of mercy. Have you had no signal mercies, since you fell asleep? No surprising deliverances or unexpected restorations? No relief from sorrow, and disgrace, and care? No increase of substance, no additions to your comfort, no enlarged opportunities of usefulness to others, no occasional glimpses of heaven for yourself? And can you hear all this enumerated, and yet fail to hear the Master, in and through these mercies, saying, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

Nor is this all. Besides the voice of personal afflictions, and of public trials, and of private mercies, there is a voice in public mercies too. I ask not whether you have felt Christ's hand, or heard his voice in national prosperity, in the continuance of national advantages, and in deliverance from national calamities, too well deserved. But have you not felt his hand in mercies to the church. I refer not to the vindication of her civil rights, however timely and remarkable, but to those spiritual mercies which are apt to be forgotten in the tumult of political and party exultation. Has he not visited some forsaken spots even in the midst of surrounding desolation? Has he not

appeared there, to heal divisions, to reform abuses, to arouse attention, to decide the wavering, to reclaim backsliders, to increase the spirit of prayer, to give life and vigour to the preaching of the word, to make temporal affairs look small, and eternal things as large as life? "To open the eyes of many blind, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" And what is the language of these signal mercies to us, who, all around, have stood still and seen the salvation of God? Stood still! nay rather, who have lain asleep. Is it not the voice of God, reproaching our unwatchfulness and spiritual slumber? Is it not the voice of the Son of Man, in sorrow not in anger, saying to us here, as he once said in Gethsemane: "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?"

These words were twice repeated, after the first and second agony and prayer. But when our Lord had for the third time fallen prostrate and arisen, when he came a third time to his friends and found them sleeping, he no longer expostulated; he no longer asked whether they could not watch with him one hour. He aroused them indeed, but with another form of speech: "Sleep on now," or "hereafter," as it might have been translated. There is something far more awful in this mild but significant permission to sleep on, than in all the invectives or reproofs he could have uttered. "Sleep on henceforth and take your rest." Oh! what a rest is that which must be taken while our Master is betrayed, and scourged, and buffeted, and spit upon! "It is enough," or rather, "it is finished; it is now too late to watch."

"Behold," and here perhaps he pointed to Iscariot as he drew near with his gang—"behold the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." Brethren, do your hearts swell with shame and indignation, as you hear the Son of Man thus addressing his disciples, who had slept, instead of watching to protect his sacred agony from premature intrusion, and to protect themselves from coming danger? What, then, will be your feelings when he thus addresses you? when after rousing you, reproaching you, and warning you in vain; after saying, by afflictions and by mercies, public and private, both to you and to the Church, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" and seeing you, in each case, relapse at once into a state of slumber, he shall cease to visit you with salutary warnings, give you up to the stagnation of your spiritual sloth, and, by his providential dealings, say to you, and those around you, "Sleep on now, and take your rest?" Can you bear it? Can any of us bear it? Yes we can bear it, without pain, and with indifference, because he will not say it till all other means have failed, and till our hearts are hard through the deceitfulness of sin. If we wait for this last, sad, terrible farewell to break our slumbers, before we begin to watch and pray, we wait forever. The only hope is to anticipate that moment; to hear our Lord, beforehand saying, "Sleep on now;" to imagine, while we have some feeling left, what we should feel, if we heard him tell us now to take our rest, because it is too late to watch, because the hour is already come, and the Son of Man is just about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

I fear it is a growing sin and error of the Church, to forget that the man Christ Jesus still exists; to act as if we thought that his humanity evaporated, or became assimilated to the cloud which bore him from the mountain to the skies. Or if we believe in his continued existence as a man, we are too apt to think of him as feeling no concern, no human sympathy in our affairs. I dare not lift the veil which God has hung around our Saviour's present residence, or, with profane conjecture, try to penetrate its mysteries; but as long as I believe the Bible, how can I forget that Christ is still a witness of terrestrial things, and that he has a heart to feel, not only for the sorrows, but for the sins of his disciples. Oh, if instead of our jejune conceptions of an abstract deity, an abstract Christ, and an ideal heaven, we could think and feel about him as the twelve did when he was absent from their sight; when, for example, he had just ascended, and their minds were stamped with fresh impressions of his person; if we could think of him, not as a nonentity, not as an ancient half-forgotten personage, but as we think of friends whom we have lost; then we should read his history with other eyes, and other hearts. Oh, then, it would be easy to believe that he, who was with the disciples in the garden, is now here; that he, whose heart was touched by their neglect, may still be touched by ours; that he, who said to them, "Sleep on now," may say the same to us. God grant that the time be not at hand, when he shall thus speak to all or any of those present! God grant that the spiritual dearth which we experience, and the multiplied evils which have vexed

the Church, be not so many voices, in which Christ is saying to us, "Sleep on now, and take your rest; the hour is come."

That this may not prove to be indeed the case, we must arise and call upon our God; we must come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. But oh remember, that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. When the presumptuous Simon was at last aroused, and saw his Master's danger, he thought to atone by violence for past neglect. And many a modern Simon does the same. When once aroused they draw the sword of fiery fanaticism, to wound themselves and others, and it is often not till they have shed much precious blood, that they are calm enough to hear the Saviour saying, "Put up again thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." And it is not too much to say, that most of those who, in our own day, have conspicuously grasped the sword of fierce vindictive zeal, have perished by it, not in their souls, but in their character and influence. God's retributions are infallible and just. The torrent of ferocious zeal which recently swept over us, and threatened all our ancient landmarks with subversion, has subsided, or been hardened, like the lava, into rock, while the landmarks, which it hid from sight, at one time by its surges, still retain their ancient places, unconsumed, unshaken. But is there no danger from an opposite direction? Is it any consolation that the sword is in its scabbard, if the bearers of the sword are fast asleep, instead of watching? Is there no cause to fear that, having vanquished error and dis-

order, as we think, we shall fall asleep upon our arms and laurels? Oh let us remember, that the enemies of Christ are still to be contended with, not only in the Church and world, but in the hearts of men, and in our own hearts individually. Let us bear in mind that although every heresy were banished from our pulpits and our schools, we may not cease to watch and pray, lest we should enter into worse temptation; lest, in the midst of an unprofitable orthodoxy, souls should be lost through our untimely slumbers. If this is to be dreaded above all disaster, watch, brethren, watch and pray!

III.

Matthew 11, 12.—From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

What we call the old economy or old dispensation, was a temporary and preparatory system, extending only to the advent of the Saviour, or, at most, to the completion of his saving work. His appearance necessarily brought with it a change of dispensations, which had been foreseen and provided for from the beginning. But this part of the divine purpose had been gradually lost sight of, and the Jews had learned to regard their temporary system as perpetual, and its symbolical rites as intrinsically efficacious. To such a state of feeling and opinion the abrogation of the ancient system seemed a monstrous revolution, a calamitous catastrophe, the prospect of which shocked their strongest prepossessions, and seemed to blast their dearest hopes. In order to correct this error, and prepare the way for the event so much dreaded, even by many devout Jews, it pleased God to adopt a method which should symbolize, and, as it were, embody the true relation of the old and new economy, and the change by which the one was to replace the other.

To secure this end, Christ did not come abruptly, but was preceded by a forerunner, whose personal relations to him, and whose public ministry, presented, in a kind of type or emblem, the peculiar features of the Law as contrasted with the Gospel—or rather, exhibited, at one view, both the points of resemblance and of dissimilitude. These points are obvious enough. As, on the one hand, both the old and the new dispensation were alike from God, equally genuine and equally authoritative; as they were both intended for man's benefit, and, ultimately, for the benefit of men in general; as the grand design of both was moral and spiritual, not material and temporal; so, on the other hand, while one was provisional, the other was permanent; one was preparatory to the other, and by necessary consequence, inferior in dignity; the peculiar features of the one were, in a great measure, arbitrary and conventional, those of the other, necessary and essential; the one was typical and ceremonial in its character, the other spiritual and substantial. The one was meant to teach the need and excite the desire of what could be fully supplied only by the other.

These resemblances and contrasts of the two great systems, were to be embodied in the person and the ministry of two individuals as their representatives. Of the gospel, no such representative was needed except Christ himself. In the one employed to represent the Law, it might have been expected that these prerequisites would meet; that he should be personally near akin to Him whose way he came to prepare; that he should be a person of high rank and

sacred dignity; that he should live, secluded from the rest of men, a life of abstinent austerity; that the moral tone, both of his doctrine and example, should be high; that his appeals should be directly to the conscience, and intended to excite the sense of guilt, danger, want, and weakness; that for this very reason, his entire ministry should be prospective and preparatory, introductory to something intrinsically better and practically more efficacious than itself. All this might have seemed beforehand necessary in the forerunner who was to symbolize the old dispensation, as distinguished from the new; and all this was actually realized in the person and ministry of John the Baptist. He was a kinsman of our Lord; he was a little older, both in person and in office; he was of sacerdotal rank and lineage; the child of eminently pious parents; one whose birth had been announced and accompanied by messages from heaven and remarkable divine interpositions; a Nazarite from the womb; a dweller in the desert from early youth "until the day of his showing unto Israel."

With the old dispensation he was clearly connected by remarkable prophecies, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord—as the messenger who should come before the face of the Angel of the Covenant—as the new Elijah or Elias, in whose ministry the spirit and power of the old reformer were to be revived in Judah, scarcely less apostate now than Israel was then. His connexion with the old dispensation was made still more clear and marked, by external coincidences, providentially secured and made conspicuous. His local

habitation carried back the thoughts of those who saw or heard him, to the forty years error in the desert, and the giving of the law upon Mt. Sinai. His ministrations at the Jordan called to mind the passage of that river at the conquest of Canaan. His hairy garments and abstemious fare, reminded all spectators of the prophets in general, and Elijah in particular. His distant calls upon the people to go out to him, instead of seeking them in their usual places of resort, was perfectly analogous to the segregation and seclusion of the chosen people under the law, and to the local and restrictive institutions of the law itself.

With all this agreed his preaching, which was preparatory. He called men to repentance, as essential to remission of sins, but he did not offer remission itself. He preached the kingdom of heaven, not as already established, but as at hand. He described himself as a mere forerunner, inferior in dignity and power to one who was to follow, and to whom he was not worthy, in his own strong language, to perform the menial office of unlacing or carrying his sandals.

The same thing is true of the significant rite, by which his preaching was accompanied, and from which he derived his title. The baptism of John was merely the forerunner of the baptism of Christ—the baptism of repentance as distinguished from the baptism of faith—the baptism of water as distinguished from the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. From all this, it is evident that John's preparatory ministry was perfectly adapted to its providential purpose, that of embodying, and, as it were, personifying the

true relation of the old dispensation to the new, of the law to the gospel, not as rival or antagonistic systems, but as the beginning and the end, the inception and perfection of the same great process.

That the resemblance of the type and the things typified might be complete, it was ordered that John's ministry, instead of ceasing when our Lord's began, should be contemporaneous with it for a time, just as the old and new dispensations, for important providential reasons, were to merge or fade into each other, without any clearly defined point of transition or line of demarkation, so that the Church, under both its manifestations, might maintain its identity, and be, like its master's robe, "without seam, woven from the top throughout." (John 19, 23.) The consequence of this was, that, while some rejected both, and some passed through John's, as a preparatory school to that of Christ, others remained in it after its preparatory work was done, just as the body of the Jews eventually clung to the Mosaic dispensation, after it had answered its design and been superseded by the dispensation of the Son and Spirit. To such it is not, perhaps, surprising that the proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus should have seemed inconclusive. It is much more surprising that the faith of John himself should seem to waver, after his imprisonment, as some suppose to be implied in his message, sent by two of his disciples to our Lord: Art thou he that is to come, or are we waiting for another? However easy it may be to explain this, by supposing it to be intended merely to confirm the faith or solve the doubts of his disciples, neither of these solutions is absolutely needed, or

so natural as that which supposes that the message was expressive of John's own misgivings, not indeed as to the person of Messiah, which had been made known to him by special revelation, and to which he had repeatedly and publicly borne witness, but with respect to our Saviour's method of proceeding, which appears to have departed too much from the spirit and the forms of the Old Testament, to be entirely satisfactory or even intelligible to the last prophet of the old economy, whose inspiration did not reach beyond the close of the system which was done away in Christ. The person of Christ himself, as the founder of a new dispensation, he distinctly recognized, but he does not seem to have been prepared, by any divine teaching, for the total revolution in the external mode of serving God and saving souls, which began to be disclosed in the personal ministry of Christ himself.

That this is the true solution of John's seeming vacillation—namely, that he still stood on the ground of the Old Testament, and still belonged to the Jewish dispensation, and was, therefore, not prepared, without a special revelation, which had not been vouchsafed to him, to understand or appreciate the new state of things which Christ had partially begun to introduce—may be gathered from our Saviour's treatment of his message. After sending back the messengers, with a reference to the miracles which they beheld, as proofs of his Messiahship, he seems to have hastened to prevent any unjust or unfavourable inferences, by the multitudes, from what they had just heard, as if John the Baptist had retracted his testi-

mony, or wavered in his own belief. To this end, he reminded them, in lively, figurative terms, peculiarly adapted to affect an oriental audience, that when they went forth in such vast crowds to the wilderness, to hear and be baptized of John, the man whom they had sought and found there, was like any thing rather than a reed shaken by the wind—a man of versatile and fickle temper, or of uncertain, fluctuating judgment—and like any thing rather than a softly dressed and smooth-tongued courtier, who suppressed the truth to flatter and conciliate his hearers. On the contrary, they knew that John the Baptist was an eminently bold, uncompromising, plain-spoken witness to the truth of God, and against the sins of men. It would be folly, therefore, to suppose that his public testimony to our Lord's Messiahship, was either given insincerely, through the fear of men and the desire to please them, or was now retracted, from a wavering faith or fickleness of temper. This would be inconceivable in such a man, though uninspired; how much more in a prophet—a prophet in the full and highest sense of the Old Testament expression—a prophet equal in authority to any who had gone before him; nay, in one respect superior to them all, as the immediate forerunner of the new dispensation, as the last in the long series of Old Testament prophets, in whom the succession was to cease, or from whom it was to pass and be forever merged in the prophetic ministry of Christ himself. All the prophets of the law, *i. e.* all the prophetic intimations of the old economy, whether formal predictions or typical prefigurations—not excepting the general prospective

character which stamped the system as a whole, as well as some of its more salient points—all these, our Saviour tells the people, prophesied as far as up to John the Baptist; not that he was the great end to which they pointed,—this was Christ himself, as John had again and again solemnly declared,—but he was the last of the forerunners, of the heralds who proclaimed the advent and prepared the way of the Great Deliverer: down to John the Baptist, and including him, this preparatory and premonitory system still continued, and in him, as the immediate predecessor of the Saviour, it must have an end.

The very same considerations, therefore, which exalted John the Baptist in the scale of the old economy, proved that he belonged to it, and not to the new. While it was still true that there had never before appeared a greater man, when measured by that standard, it was equally true that the least in the kingdom of heaven—the new dispensation—was greater than he, *i. e.* more enlightened as to the nature of that dispensation, and the points in which it differed from the old, and better able, both to appreciate and carry into execution this new form of the divine administration, than even the greater of those, who, though invested with divine authority, were still but ministers of the old restrictive system, and might, therefore, be expected to feel some surprise, if not displeasure, at the sudden disuse of the ancient methods, the neglect of mere externals, so inseparable from religion under the Mosaic institutions, and the casting down not only of the barriers between strict Jews and notorious sinners of their own race, but between that

race itself and those from which it had for ages dwelt apart, a change already unequivocally intimated in our Lord's instructions and his practice, and which, viewed from the ground of the old dispensation, might well seem to confound unchangeable distinctions and to make Christ the minister of sin.

That such misapprehensions should exist in the mind of John the Baptist, as a prophet of the old dispensation, is certainly less strange, and in itself not more incredible, than that Peter, even after the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, should have still cherished the belief that, although the Gentiles might be saved as well as Jews, through faith in the Redeemer, they could only exercise that faith by first becoming Jews, or conforming to the law of Moses. Of this error he was disabused by a special revelation; and as none such seems to have been sent to John the Baptist, it is not surprising that without it, and in prison, he should have looked at what was going on beyond the walls of the fortress where he lay, with the eyes of an Old Testament prophet, rather than with those of a New Testament saint.

This seems, as I have said, to be implied in our Lord's vindication of him, as a true believer and a great prophet, but still a minister of the Old Testament, not of the New, to whom the freedom and enlargement of the course on which our Lord had either actually entered, or prospectively marked out for his apostles, might very naturally seem to be a general removal of old landmarks, and a lifting of the floodgates which had hitherto shut off the appropriated waters of the Jewish church from the natural stream

and current of the nations. Even in vindicating John, our Saviour seems to intimate that this distinguished prophet had been led, by his peculiar position with respect to the outgoing and incoming dispensation, to expect that the kingdom of Messiah would be set up by a methodical and formal process, perhaps not without a large admixture of ceremonial services; at all events, with due conformity to ancient usages and regulations; "whereas," he adds, as if appealing to their own observation for the proof of the assertion, "from the days of John the Baptist until now," *i. e.* since the work of my forerunner was completed, and my own begun, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force."

That this does not refer to persecution, is apparent from the notorious fact, that the only persecution which had yet taken place, was that of John himself, who had just been excluded from the kingdom of heaven in the technical, distinctive sense, or, at least, assigned the lowest place in it, which, of course, forbids his treatment by his enemies to be regarded or described as that experienced by the kingdom of heaven. Equally incorrect is the assumption, that the violence here mentioned in connexion with the kingdom of heaven, is active, not passive—the kingdom of heaven exercises violence or irresistible power over men. This is equally at variance with the usage of the words immediately in question and with the other clause—the violent take it by force. The only natural interpretation is the one which takes the whole as a bold and strong, but striking and intelligible figure, to denote the eagerness and freedom from

restraint, with which men of every class and character, Pharisees and publicans, reputed saints and sinners, Jews and Gentiles, had begun or were soon to begin to press into the kingdom of heaven, through or over every barrier, moral, legal, ceremonial, or natural distinction.

The particular image most readily suggested by the words, is, perhaps, that of a fortress long maintained by a veteran garrison, but suddenly thrown open by its new commander, and impetuously entered by what seems to be a multitude of foes. To those within, this might well appear to put an end to the defence and to decide the contest. But after a while it is perceived that those who have thus tumultuously entered, are not enemies, but friends, and that this violent accession to the strength of the defence is more effective than any which could have been secured by gradual recruitings or occasional desertions from the enemy, however necessary these resources may be when the other fails, or in the intervals between these sudden and extensive movements from without to the interior of the fortress or the besieged town. In some points this comparison, like every other, does not hold good; but it may serve to illustrate the essential difference between John the Baptist's expectations, and the course actually taken by our Saviour, and referred to in the words of the text: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

The circumstances of the case to which these words had primary reference, were so peculiar, so in-

capable of repetition or recurrence, that it may seem impossible to draw from them any lesson directly applicable to ourselves or to the actual condition of the church or of the world. It is not, however, as a matter of historical curiosity, an interesting reminiscence of antiquity, that this and many other similar discourses of our Saviour have been left on record. They were rather intended to exemplify the nature and distinctive character of his kingdom, as distinguished not only from all false religions, but from all that was temporary in the ancient manifestation of the true, and thereby to preserve us from falling into errors which were committed and corrected eighteen centuries ago. We are, therefore, at liberty, nay bound, to apply these instructions to our own use, not by fanciful accommodation, not by allegorical confusion of things utterly distinct, but by a fair application of the principle involved in the original case to any other case, however distant and however different in form and circumstance, to which that principle is naturally applicable. Let us briefly inquire then, in the present instance, wherein the essence of the error here exposed consisted, and what analogous forms of error may exist among ourselves.

That the old dispensation, while it lasted, was entitled to respect as a divine institution, if it needed any proof, might be established, both by the precept and example of our Saviour. Even after it was virtually abrogated by the death and resurrection and ascension of our Lord and by the advent of the Holy Spirit, the apostles, acting by divine direction, still paid a certain tribute of respect to the framework of

the old economy, until it was forever shaken down and scattered by a great convulsion. The error now in question, therefore, did not lie in any undue deference to the Law as a temporary system, but in making it the standard and the rule of God's most gracious dispensations under an entirely different state of things; and more particularly in supposing, that access to the Messiah's kingdom was to be as circuitous and slow and ceremonious, as the approach of Gentile converts to the altar and the oracle of God had been for ages, when, in fact, the kingdom of heaven had already begun to suffer violence, and the violent were actually taking it by force.

Into this identical mistake there is, of course, no danger of our falling. The change of circumstances already spoken of, has rendered it impossible. But may not a kindred error, and one equally pernicious, be committed now? God has appointed certain means to be assiduously used for the extension of the church and the conversion of the world. The obligation to employ these means is imperative, and cannot be dispensed with. The very fact of their divine authority entitles us to look for the most salutary effects from their constant and faithful application. We cannot err, therefore, by excess in the employment of these means. But may we not err by limiting the Holy One himself to means—even those which he has sanctioned and blessed? May we not err by supposing, that because it is our duty to make constant, prayerful, and believing use of these means, and to watch for their effect, there is nothing more to be expected—even from the free and sovereign operation of

divine grace? In other words, by looking too much, or, at least, too exclusively, at the ordinary results of ordinary means, may we not cease to hope for those extraordinary gifts, with which the Lord is sometimes pleased, as it were, to reward the faithful use of the stated and appointed means of grace?

There is no doubt an opposite error, into which we are no less prone to fall, and from which the Church has suffered incalculable loss and damage. This is the error of expecting all from God's extraordinary gifts, to the exclusion of those stated means which he has ordained, and on which he has not only promised but bestowed a blessing. This error, pushed to an extreme, becomes fanaticism, and is the fruitful source of doctrinal corruptions, practical abuses, spiritual pride, and all the other evils springing from a violent excitement followed by reaction towards the opposite extreme of lethargy and deadness. The error which produces all these evils, does not merely lie in the denial or oblivion of the fact that God's extraordinary blessings must, from their very nature, be occasional, but also in denying or forgetting that extraordinary gifts are, according to a law of God's most gracious dispensations, not bestowed at random, but conferred as blessings on the faithful use of ordinary means.

To expect an extraordinary harvest, without using the means necessary to secure an ordinary one, would be scarcely more absurd than to concentrate all our hopes and wishes on extraordinary spiritual visitations, while we wilfully or negligently slight the stated and invariable means of doing and obtaining good, on which God sometimes sets the seal of his approval

by remarkable outpourings of his spirit. As the manna in the wilderness did not take the place of ordinary food, but supplied its deficiencies, and furnished special proofs of the divine presence and favour to his people; so the greatest spiritual gifts to the Church now, are not intended to supplant the use of ordinary means, but rather to encourage it by signs of the divine approbation; and the hope of such extraordinary gifts is never better founded than at those times when, instead of intermitting ordinary duties, we perform them with redoubled zeal.

But no extreme of judgment or of practice is to be corrected by another. While we shun the error of relying on extraordinary gifts as a substitute for ordinary duties, or as an apology for slighting them, let us not lose sight of such extraordinary gifts altogether, or regard them as impossible and hopeless, or as inconsistent with the faithful use of ordinary means. By so doing, we gratuitously throw away one of the most powerful incitements to duty, and most efficacious stimulants to hope and zeal. Nothing is better suited to invigorate habitual exertion than a firm belief that God bestows his most invaluable and special gifts on such as diligently seek for those of a more ordinary nature. To relinquish this belief and hope, is to cut the sinews of our spiritual strength even in relation to our ordinary duties. At the same time, this extreme of error and misconduct tends more directly to diminish the amount of good which we might otherwise accomplish. While it still remains indisputably true, that the extension of the Chruch and the conversion of the world are suspended,

under God, upon the constant use of ordinary means, for the neglect of which nothing can compensate or atone; it is equally certain that the aggregate result of these means would be comparatively small, without occasional accessions of divine and human strength, making good, as it were by a single movement, the arrears of many years; and giving a new impulse to those means which, though they cannot be dispensed with, are too apt, in human hands, to grow inert and inefficient, unless frequently renewed and set in motion by a special divine influence. In other words, and in accordance with the figurative language of the text, although the kingdom of heaven, even now, as when it was first visibly erected upon earth, must grow by constant gradual accession, and although, if this mode of increase should fail, its place could be supplied by nothing else, yet even this increase is stimulated, and the aggregate result indefinitely multiplied, by those occasional seasons of awakening and commotion, when "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

I rejoice to know that I address some, I trust many, to whom the extension of this kingdom is a subject of intense desire and fervent prayer. But do the hopes of such bear due proportion to their conscientious labours and their zeal for God? Are we not, Christian brethren, too prone to despondency, as well as to presumption and security; extremes which are continually found in close proximity, not only among members of the same community, but in the vacillating, varying experience of one and the same person? And may not one of these extremes at least,

arise from the mistake which we have been considering, the mistaken notion that because Christ's kingdom must be built up by a slow and sure increase, there is no such thing to be expected as a general and powerful commotion of men's minds, producing the same result upon a larger scale and in a shorter time; that because that vast reservoir of God's grace and man's happiness is fed by rivulets and drops in ordinary times, there is no such thing to be expected as the sight of an irresistible current impetuously setting in the same direction; that because we are accustomed to see men gained over, one by one, from the service of Satan and the world to that of God, there is no such thing to be expected in our days as that of the kingdom of heaven suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force? Oh, let us see to it, that even our attachment to the stated ordinary means of grace, and our well-founded fears of spurious and fanatical excitements, do not unfit us for the reception of extraordinary mercies, and betray us, for a time at least, into unreasonable trust in accustomed forms and methods, and a groundless dread of irregularity and insubordination, simply because in this day, as in that day, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Is there not still a class to whom I may, without offence, address myself in terms of solemn warning and entreaty, in application of the subject which has been before us? I mean such as have long enjoyed the stated dispensation of God's word, but as yet seem not to have experienced its power. To such I venture to address myself directly, and to put the question,

Are you not, perhaps unconsciously, relying on this passive enjoyment of religious privileges as a means of safety, independent of all serious reflection or exertion on your own part? Such a state of mind may be produced by a misapprehension or abuse of the doctrines which you have ever been faithfully taught, of God's sovereignty and man's dependence. But this only makes your error more alarming, and your danger more imminent. God is indeed the only Saviour, the alpha and omega of our hopes, the author and the finisher of our salvation; but he does not save men in their sleep, or carry them to heaven stupefied in deathlike lethargy. If he means to save you, be assured he will awaken you. However various the degrees and forms of that alarm which enters into all evangelical repentance, or prepares the way for it, you must experience some disturbance of your long and deep sleep of security. If the absence of any such emotion is the fault of God himself, derive what consolation you find possible from this blasphemous apology; but do not forget that after all, whatever be the cause, and wherever the blame lies, your deep sleep must be broken or you never will be saved. With all allowance for the freedom and variety of God's dispensations towards the souls of men, and for the difference produced by constitution, education, and the previous mode of life, it is still true that you cannot doze or dream yourself into salvation; that in some sense, and to some extent, a vehement exertion is required and produced in every soul to which God has purposes of mercy; and that this is not peculiar to one age or country, but characteristic of God's saving

methods in all times and places. So that in a certain sense it may still be truly and emphatically said that "from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

IV.

Isaiah 55, 1.—Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat: yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.

As Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, his servants must do likewise. Their work, like their Master's, is to save lost souls. They cannot save, like him, by their own power or merit. But as instruments in his hands they may be the means of saving. Not the preacher only, but the humblest Christian in his little sphere, is bound, in some way, and in some degree, to seek and to save that which is lost. With this commission we are all sent forth. We are not sent to a world which is merely in danger of being lost. It is lost. It is condemned already. The gospel is not merely a method of prevention, but of cure. Christ came to save that which was lost already, and to seek it, in order that it might be saved, and we, as his instruments, are bound to seek the lost that we may save them. We are not to keep back the salvation of the gospel till men seek it for themselves. We must offer it to them. We must press it upon them. We must not only spread the feast, but bid men to it.

It is our business to invite men to the Saviour. We must therefore learn the art of invitation. And we cannot learn it better than from God's example. The Bible is full of invitations, varied in form, but alike in principle, proceeding from the same source, addressed to the same objects, and conveying the same offer. Let these invitations be the models of our own, and let us, upon this occasion, take a lesson from the one before us, which is among the most earnest, free, importunate, and touching in the Word of God.

In order to appreciate and understand it, let us look back for a moment to what goes before. After various partial exhibitions of the Saviour as a prophet or divine teacher, he is fully set before us in the fifty-third chapter as a priest and sacrifice, who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, upon whom the chastisement of our peace fell, and by whose stripes we are healed, upon whom the Lord laid the iniquities of us all, who was stricken for the transgressions of his people, who made his soul an offering for sin, who justified many by bearing their iniquities, who poured out his soul unto death and was numbered with the transgressors, who bare the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors. These strong expressions, which are all collected from that one short chapter, leave no doubt as to its subject. The utmost ingenuity of Jews and Gentiles has been baffled in the effort to invent another.

Here, then, the foundation of the sinner's hope is laid, the only one that can be laid, "for there is no

other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." In the fifty-fourth chapter, the Church is assured that notwithstanding her afflictions, she shall taste the fruit of this great expiation. She is exhorted to prepare for an immense accession; to enlarge the place of her tent, and stretch forth the curtain of her habitations, to lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes. She is told that her seed shall inherit the Gentiles, that although her national pre-eminence shall cease, her spiritual greatness shall be vastly magnified by being rendered co-extensive with the earth; that her children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of her children; that no weapon formed against her shall prosper, and that every tongue which rises against her shall be condemned. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

Having thus assured the Church of her enlargement and prosperity, the prophet takes a wider range; he looks towards those from among whom this accession to the Church is to be gathered; he remembers the mixed multitude of lost men who are wandering in the wilderness, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. He sees them fainting there with spiritual thirst, a sense of guilt, an undefined, uneasy longing after something not possessed; something as necesary to refresh the soul as water to the panting hart, or to the gasping Arab in the desert. He sees them not only parched with thirst, but gnawed by hunger: nature craves something to support as well as to re-

fresh her, and in obedience to her call, he sees them labouring with desperate exertion to dig up some nutritious root, or some buried fragment from the burning sand. He sees them wading through that soil of fire to some distant shrub which holds out the last dying hope of food, and as they reach it, he beholds them turn away from its barren stalk and withered leaves, to lie down in despair, while others scarcely less exhausted, follow in the same vain search.

Such scenes are not uncommon in the deserts of the east, where men are often found to choose between starvation and the use of food from which nature even in extremity revolts, while the agony of thirst is rendered ten times more acute by the deceitful water of the desert which becomes hot sand upon the traveller's approach. And yet all this is nothing more than a faint image of the desert in which men are born, and where they wander till reclaimed by God; a desert which is not without its hot sands and its leafless shrubs, its weariness, its bitter pangs, its thirst, its famine, rendered more tormenting by the cruel mockery of its illusions. This is the picture which the world presents to every eye from which the scales have fallen. This is the picture which the prophet seems to have beheld in vision when he stood upon the walls of Zion, and looked far off into the recesses of that desert stretching all around her, out of which he knew that some were to be gathered into Zion, and at which he therefore gazes with a yearning pity; not his own merely, but the pity of that God whose Spirit gave him utterance.

For as he looks he speaks, he cries aloud, as if to persons at a distance. He no longer addresses himself merely to the church. His language is as wide and comprehensive as the sins and wants of suffering humanity. It is to men as men that he appeals. "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man," without distinction or exception. "Ho, every one that thirsteth!" He does not say every child of Israel. He does not say every godly proselyte. He does not say every upright, blameless man. He does not even say every one who repents, or every one who believes, but every one who thirsts. He presupposes nothing but a sense of need; no knowledge, but the consciousness of misery and helplessness; not even a knowledge of the method of salvation. Here then it is thus that God begins his invitations. He appeals to that uneasy sense of something needed, what or why the sinner knows not; to the spiritual thirst by which his soul is parched, he knows not how. Where this exists, no other qualification is demanded.

That so few accept of it is not owing to the want of freeness in the offer, nor to the want of merit in those whom it is made to. But they will not hear. The voice cries in the wilderness, but those to whom it is addressed refuse to hear. Or if they listen, it is so incredulously that they hear in vain. If their attention could be fixed but for a moment, they would surely hear in earnest. When the starved and panting pilgrim, as he lies extended in the desert, hears a distant cry, exhaustion may have stupefied him so that he regards it not. Or if the sound arouses him,

he may mistake it for the cry of the wild beast, or the voice of other sufferers like himself. But if these words distinctly fall upon his ear, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," unless despair has made him utterly incredulous, he must be startled and aroused. And even though he deem the tidings too good to be true, he will at least put forth one effort more to reach the spot from which the sound comes.

But, alas! in the spiritual desert it is harder to gain the ear of those who are dying with thirst, even by urgent calls to drink and live. They are the subjects of perpetual illusion. They continue still to hope for quick relief from some phantasma, some deceitful sight or sound, in chase of which they will not listen to the only voice which offers them substantial relief. Think how constantly the offers of the gospel are reiterated in the ears of thousands who are really athirst, whose life is spent in seeking to allay that inward thirst by copious draughts of knowledge, fame, or pleasure, or by filling their parched mouths with the burning sand of this world's gains. They are partly conscious of a void within them which the world can never fill, and yet the only voice of invitation which they will not hear is that of God crying, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." The only stream at which they will not try to slake their thirst is the river of the water of life. What shall be done then? Shall the offer be suspended? Shall the voice of invitation be less loud and urgent? No, let those who utter it cry aloud and spare not. Let no deluded soul be lost, because the calls of sal-

vation were too faint and few? It is true the cry will never be obeyed, nor even listened to until the ear is supernaturally opened. Till then, the sinner will be deaf as the adder to the voice of the charmer charming never so wisely. And the Christian's consolation under all discouragement from man's unwillingness to hear is this, that the call is God's call, and that when he pleases, he can render it effectual.

But while we draw from this consideration all the comfort which it is adapted to afford, let it not be made a pretext for unfaithfulness or negligence in doing our part as the messengers of Christ. While it is certain that no soul will perish which does not abundantly deserve to die; and on the other hand that none whom God elects to everlasting life will fail to hear the voice which calls them to the fountain of salvation; it is also certain that the loss of some sinners will bring aggravated guilt upon the souls of those who should have called them and who did not; or who called so faintly that it never reached the ears of those to whom the word was sent, or if it reached their ears, it never touched their hearts, so calmly and so coldly was the invitation uttered.

Let us ask ourselves this question: Are the calls and invitations of the gospel, at this moment, uttered loud enough? Are there voices enough joining in the cry, to make it audible? Is it heard in the desert? Is it heard in those dark places of the earth which are full of the habitations of cruelty? Is our voice heard there, through the messengers whom we have sent? Is it heard at home? Even among ourselves is the cry as loud and piercing as it ought to be? Even

where purity of doctrine is maintained, and where the evidence of practical religion does exist, may there not be a want of earnestness and fervour in proclaiming that which is really believed? May not the very dread of spurious excitement, which the church has seen abundant cause to feel, be pushed so far as to produce a coldness and appearance of indifference in publishing the offers of the gospel, which amounts, in practical effect, almost to a denial of the very truths affirmed, and a retracting of the invitations offered? It is a question to be seriously pondered, whether much of the indifference with which the invitations of the gospel are received, does not arise from the apparent absence of all lively feeling on the part of those who make them. And this, not only in relation to the public formal preaching of the word, but also in reference to those private occasions upon which the individual Christian may be called to say to those who hear his voice, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" Let the invitations which we offer in the name of Christ, be, like his own, earnest and free, addressed to all who feel the need of them. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"

The figures here used need but little explanation, and that little only to secure a just discrimination between things which differ. The same divine grace is exhibited under three distinct aspects; water refreshes, milk nourishes, wine cheers. To the thirsty soul the prophet offers water, to the famished milk, to the despondent wine. The same grace which relieves our spiritual lassitude and weariness of life, re-

moves the cause of these distressing symptoms, by supplying the materials of spiritual strength, feeding the soul with knowledge—not only religious but experimental knowledge—and the same grace which thus strengthens, while it gives repose, goes further, and produces holy joy. To all this the sinner is invited in the gospel. Is he thirsty? Is he conscious of a want within him which must be supplied before he can enjoy repose, and does he find that this vague feeling of deficiency is more distressing, the more undefined it is? And does this exhaust and as it were dry up the very fountains of his life, with an effect equivalent to that of parching thirst, until his soul is ready to cry out, My moisture is turned into the drought of summer? Even amidst the press of secular employments and the whirl of frantic gaiety, this thirst of spirit has been often felt; nay, it has been itself the means of plunging men in business or in pleasure, in the hope of extinguishing that fever in the veins which will not let them rest. But in vain do they drink at the polluted springs of pleasure and the broken cisterns of man's wisdom; the fire still rages—it consumes and exhausts them more and more, until at last, the excitement of unsatisfied desire subsides into a desperate apathy, beneath which smoulder the remains of half-quenched passions, which, if once rekindled, will burn unto the lowest hell.

Society is full of those whose hearts have thus been scorched and blasted in the vain attempt to satisfy a craving soul with any thing but God. The sense of want remains, but it no longer stimulates to action;

it is like the thirst of those who have exhausted nature in the effort to find water in the desert, and have fallen down to die. The thirst which they before felt, is now but one among a multitude of symptoms which premonish speedy death. Perhaps you know such. If you do not, you at least know those whose minds are restless under disappointment, and a sense of insufficiency in every thing which this world offers to allay their inward thirst. If you know such, and would act the part of Christians towards them, do not foster their delusive hope of finding yet among the untried springs and cisterns of the world, what they have thus far sought in vain; but taking your stand by the fountain of life which Christ has opened, cry to them in a voice too loud and piercing to be heard without attention, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" Here bathe those burning brows and steep those parched lips, and slake that never-dying thirst which has become inseparable from your very being.

There are few scenes in fiction or in real life better suited to create a vivid impression of refreshment and relief, than those descriptions given by some travellers in the great Sahara, of the finding of a well, after an interval of terrible privation. The delirious joy, the frantic struggle for precedence, the impetuous delight with which the panting sufferer plunges his head into the long-sought element—the very picture brings refreshment with it; but alas! our sympathies are few and faint with spiritual objects, or we certainly should find what I have just described an imperfect emblem of the new life breathed into the

soul, when plunged into the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, first, to be cleansed, and then, when all impurity has passed away, to drink. Ah, my hearers, is it possible for those who have once tasted of those waters, to forget them? "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon, or shall the cold flowing waters be forsaken?" Yes, such a thing is possible; for if it were not, we should not only come more constantly ourselves to this exhaustless fountain, but should cry more frequently to all them that pass by, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"

It is related by one who had experienced the horrors of the great African desert, that the thirst which had absorbed all other feelings while it raged, was no sooner slaked, than the feeling of hunger was revived in tenfold violence; and I scruple not to spiritualize this incident in illustration of the prophet's language. The sensation of relief from undefined anxiety or from a positive dread of divine wrath, however exquisite, is not enough to satisfy the soul. The more it receives, the more it feels its own deficiencies: and when its faculties have been revived by the assurance of forgiveness, it becomes aware of its own ignorance, and of those chasms which can only be filled with knowledge of the truth. This is the sense of spiritual hunger which succeeds the allaying of spiritual thirst. The soul, having been refreshed, must now be fed. The cooling, cleansing properties of water cannot repair the decaying strength. There must be nutriment, suited to the condition of the soul. And it is furnished. Here is milk as well as water. We are called, not only to refreshment but to nourishment.

The voice cries, not only "Come ye to the waters," but "Come ye, buy and eat." If refreshment only be supplied, the soul, though freed from thirst, will die of hunger. Do you know any soul in this state, fresh from the laver of regeneration and rejoicing in its change? Let us all hope to know many such. And when we do, or if we know them now, let us see to it that the first relief obtained from the waters of this fountain be succeeded by instruction—by instruction suited to the wants of babes in Christ—the sincere milk of the word. It may never be known, at least to us, in time or in eternity, how much of the fanatical abuses which have followed what appeared to be instances of genuine conversion, has arisen from neglect, or error in this very juncture. The soul has been refreshed, but it has not been fed, and inanition has excited it more fatally than it could have been excited by excess.

Has it not been a matter of familiar observation that the same men who are most successful in alarming sinners, are not always most successful in the training of new converts or the edification of established saints? And has not this diversity of gifts been made a reason for infringing on the order of God's house, and multiplying orders in the ministry? They who pursue this course forget, that while the prophet invites every one that thirsteth to the waters, he invites them at the same time to partake of milk and wine—of milk to nourish, and of wine to cheer. The supply of nature's cravings, though the first thing in order and necessity, is not the last. It is not all. The man must not only be continued in existence—his ex-

istence must be happy; it is for happiness that he desires to live, and when that which is necessary even to existence is supplied, he is not satisfied, he must have more; as the feeling of thirst gives way to that of hunger, so the sense of hunger yields to the desire of enjoyment. To be satisfied with mere life, and with that by which it is supported, would be brutal. The nobler instincts of our nature point to something for which life is worth possessing, and the very satisfaction of inferior necessities, renders those which are higher more perceptible and urgent. As the relief of doubt and dread is not enough without the knowledge of the truth, so the knowledge of the truth is not enough unless it yields enjoyment. And it does, if rightly used. The gospel offers wine, as well as milk, and water. Come and drink, not of one, but of all, of all together. Come and slake your thirst, appease your hunger, and dispel your cares; not by different means, but by the same abundant, all-sufficient grace. God makes provision, not for one want merely, but for all. If you are cooled, and not fed—if you are fed, and not exhilarated, it is not his fault, but yours; his call is not to this or that exclusively, but "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat. Yea come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price!"

I have already directed your attention to the fact, that thirst is the only qualification required of those who are invited to the fountain. No merit, no purchase money; nay, the want of this may be considered as a negative condition. Merit and money are

not only needless, they are excluded; for you see the invitation is to those who have no money, who can pay no price. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he, (or even) he that hath no money." It is true the word "buy" is added—"Come ye, buy and eat"—but the Hebrew word is not the usual equivalent to *buy:* it is a word used elsewhere to denote no purchase except that of food; and even in that application may mean properly the mere act of *procuring*, by whatever means, though commonly applied to purchase, in the strict sense. If so, it may here be understood to mean "supply yourselves." But even granting that the word means *buy* —and it must be admitted that it could not fail to suggest that idea to a Jewish reader—it appears to me that it is evidently used here for the very purpose of expressing with more emphasis the perfect freeness of the offer made. They are called to buy, indeed, but who? who are to be the buyers? Why, those who have no money; and lest this should be misunderstood as implying that some other mode of payment would be called for beside money, all misconstruction is precluded by the paradoxical, but most expressive phrase—BUY WINE AND MILK WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE. This full and unambiguous description of the offer as gratuitous, is any thing but needless or superfluous. It has its use, a most important use, in guarding men against a natural and common error.

The offers of the good things of this world are all made on a contrary condition: the calls of this world are to those who have money, those who can render some

equivalent for that which they receive. So universal is this rule, that it is often hard for men to be convinced that the offer of salvation is gratuitous. They feel that something must be rendered in return, and therefore they conclude that the forms of invitation, which imply gratuity and freeness, are to be understood as excluding merely some gross forms of compensation, that if money in the strict sense be rejected, as it must be, it is only to make way for some equivalent; and thus men, in the face of God's most solemn declarations, feed the pride of their own hearts with the delusive hope that they shall yet pay down the price of their salvation. In others, the same error may assume a humbler form. Knowing the principles on which men are accustomed to distribute their gifts, and imperfectly instructed in the principles of God's most gracious dispensations, they are ready to infer that, as they have no price to pay, they are excluded from the offer. It is just as if the poor, exhausted pilgrim in the desert, seeing others crowd around the well or cistern, should imagine that the water must be purchased, and, aware of his own poverty, relinquish all attempts to reach it.

But suppose that, just as he has come to this conclusion, a voice is heard proclaiming, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" and, as if to preclude all possibility of doubt as to the freeness of the offer, adding, "He that hath no money." How would such a person be affected by the sound? And how ought thirsting, starving, and desponding souls to be affected, when they hear the want of merit upon their part made an express condition of the offer of

salvation? And above all, how ought those who make the offer, to be watchful against every thing at all at variance with this first principle of free salvation. Shall the ignorance, or negligence, or shallow experience of those who are sent forth to seek and save the lost, be suffered to convert the free and gracious invitations of the Saviour into legal bargains, in which grace is bought and sold under some specious pretext? This is no trifling or unmeaning question. There is a spurious liberality of feeling and opinion upon this point, a spirit of concession to the legal doctrine of salvation by works, as if there were really a mere verbal difference between the two. And this feeble, compromising temper, may gain access to the pulpit and the press, without any formal dereliction of the strictest forms of orthodox belief.

The half-instructed youth who rushes hastily into the field of labour, under a strong conviction that the world is ready to perish for the want of his individual services, is very apt to carry with him a confused, unsettled view of this essential matter, and, by way of shunning metaphysical distinctions and scholastic formulas, to clog the glorious offer of a free salvation with the pitiful conditions of a mere self-righteousness. It has been done. It may be done again. But who will dare to do it? Who will dare with his eyes open to exclude from Christ those who are specially entitled to approach him, for the very reason that their guilt is great, their misery extreme, their own strength nothing, and their merit less than nothing? for instead of meriting reward, they merit punishment. Will you exclude them, or impede them, on

the ground that a gratuitous offer will encourage sin? If you do it at all, this will no doubt be your motive. And to what does it amount? That you are more afraid of sin, and more unwilling to encourage it, than God himself. The necessary consequence of what you do is to condemn your Maker.

> "Snatch from his hand the sceptre and the rod,
> Re-judge his justice, be the God of God."

They who are good enough or bad enough for Christ to save, are good enough for you to seek in order to salvation. The objection is a merely theoretical objection; it is utterly at war with all experience; the abusers of God's grace have never been the true recipients of gratuitous salvation. They have been the cavillers and carpers at it. They have often been the self-sufficient formalist, and the self-deceiving hypocrite. There is no danger in obeying God, and following his example. And as he has made the want of merit, and of all reliance upon merit a condition of acceptance with him, let us go and do likewise. Let us not act the part of the ungrateful and uncharitable servant, who no sooner had obtained from his master the remission of his own debt, than he cruelly exacted the inferior obligation of his fellow-servant. In the parable, indeed, the debt exacted was one due to the very man whose own debt had been just remitted. But we may be sure that if he had been equally severe in the exaction of debts owing to his lord, although his guilt would have been less, although his error might have sprung from an unenlightened zeal for the rights of Him by whose free

favour he had been himself forgiven, he would not have escaped censure.

Nor shall we, if we do likewise. No, my brethren, it is not the will of Him, who, as we humbly trust, has pardoned us so freely, that in publishing the gospel of his grace, we should lay hold of our wretched fellow-sinners by the throat, and say, Pay my master what thou owest. It is not the will of Christ that the salvation which he died for, which he bought by death, and which he paid for with his heart's blood to the uttermost farthing, should be brought into the market and exposed to sale by us, as if it could again be purchased by the groans wrung from the heart of the despairing sinner, who instead of being brought to Christ is thus put from him, it may be forever. If any perversion of the truth can be insulting to the Saviour, it is this. It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh. The way in which that woe may be avoided is too plain to be mistaken. It is one which brings us back to the same point from which we started; the necessity of following God's own example in the offer of salvation.

If we do this we are safe. Let us all then learn to do it. Both in public and in private, as we have occasion, let us open to the sinner's view the fountain of life, and if he will not look, or if he be so far off that he cannot see it, while he dies of thirst and hunger, let us lift up our voices, and with piercing accents bid him come and live; let us tell him that he must come or be lost forever; but beware of adding any other limitation; let us call with special

emphasis to those who are most destitute of all meritorious pretensions to be saved; to the ignorant, the desperately wicked, to the heathen; and as they pass by, rushing madly to destruction, whether near us or afar off, let us make their ears to tingle with the memorable words of the prophetic preacher, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat: yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

V.

Isaiah 55, 2.—Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Having set forth, in the first verse, the perfect adaptation of the grace which is offered in the gospel, to the wants of sinners, as a source of refreshment, spiritual strength, and divine exhilaration; and having, at the same time, exhibited its absolute and perfect freeness, by inviting men to buy it "without money and without price," the evangelical prophet now expostulates with those who are unwilling to receive it, and exposes the absurdity of thus refusing to embrace the only real good, while at the same time they are toiling in pursuit of that which is imaginary. If it were possible for men to forego all desire of happiness, and all attempts to gain it, such a course would be demonstrably unworthy of a rational and moral agent, whose entire constitution shows him to have been created for the future. But in that case, notwithstanding the stupendous guilt and folly of his conduct, he would have wherewith to parry the attacks of conscience, and evade the invitations of the

gospel, by alleging that he asked for nothing more than he possessed, that his desires were satisfied, and that it would be folly to disturb his own enjoyment and exhaust the remnant of his days in seeking that of which he felt no need, and the attainment of which could not possibly afford him any satisfaction.

It is easy to perceive the self-deluding sophistry of such a plea, assuming, as it does, the non-existence, nay impossibility of all degrees of happiness not actually experienced; an absurdity so palpable, as of itself to be an adequate preventive of that stagnant apathy which it defends. But the necessity of any such preventive is excluded by the very constitution of our nature, which has made it impossible for sentient creatures to be wholly regardless of their own well-being. Blinded and grievously mistaken they may be as to the best means of securing it, and as to the comparative amount of good attainable in that course which they are pursuing and in others. But they must pursue some course as the way to happiness. The living creature clings to life until he finds it insupportable, and even then he chooses death not as a greater but a lesser evil. It is not against a hatred of enjoyment, therefore, or an absolute indifference to it, that the grace of God and the salvation of the gospel must contend; it is against the most intense desire of happiness acting in the wrong direction, and impelling him who feels it to the use of means, which must ultimately thwart the very end which they are now employed to bring about.

The expostulation of the preacher is not, "Why, oh why are you not hungry? why do you refuse to

spend your money, and your labour in obtaining food?" but it is, "Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Observe, too, that he does not seek to remedy the evils which arise from perverted and unsatisfied desire, by the extinction of the appetite itself;—of that immortal, inextinguishable craving, which can only cease by annihilation, or by full fruition. This, indeed, is a distinctive mark of true religion, as opposed to other systems. Since the evils under which the human race is groaning may be clearly traced to the inordinate indulgence of desires after happiness, under the influence of "strong delusions," as to that which can afford it, we are not to wonder that when unassisted reason undertakes to do away with the effect, it should attempt the extirpation of the cause; and you will find accordingly that every system of religion or philosophy, distinct from Christianity, either indulges, under some disguise, that perversion of man's natural desire after happiness which makes him wretched, or affects to cure it by destroying the desire itself.

Between these Epicurean and Stoical extremes, all systems of religion but the true one have been oscillating since the world began. The one has found favour with the many, the other with the few; the one has prevailed in society at large, the other has arisen from the over-refinements of a vain philosophy. And thus these two antagonist errors have existed and produced their bitter fruit simultaneously, and under every outward form of practice and belief. While the one has shown itself in the prevailing self-

indulgence of all heathen nations, in the sensual creed and practice of the Moslem, in the Papist's compromise between his pleasures on the one hand, and his periodical confessions on the other, and in a similar but more concealed mode of compensation on the part of those who hold the truth in unrighteousness; the other has appeared in the speculations and self-denial of the old philosophers, the austerities and self-inflicted sufferings of heathen, Mohammedan, and Christian self-tormentors. And with what effect? that of plunging men in the bottomless abyss of self-indulgence on the one hand, or in that of a desperate unbelief upon the other. But while one voice cries to the bewildered sinner, "Cease to hunger, cease to thirst," and another from an opposite direction bids him "Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," the voice of God and of the gospel is, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"

The question presupposes that the soul is hungry, that it must be hungry until it is fed, that the gnawings of this hunger will constrain it to seek food, and that the instinct of self-preservation, no less than the desire of enjoyment, will induce it to give any thing it has in exchange for the necessary means of its subsistence and enjoyment; that the fatal error lies not in the seeking after something to sustain it and to make it happy, but in imagining that this end can be answered by the pleasures, gains, and honours of the world, which are not only brief in their duration, but unsuited in their nature, even while they last, to satisfy the wants of an immortal spirit. It is this view

of man's natural condition upon which the invitations of the gospel are all founded; and the absolute coincidence of this view with the lessons of experience is among the strongest proofs, not only that Christianity is better suited to the actual necessities of man than any other system of belief, but also that it is a plan devised by one who had an intimate and perfect knowledge of our nature; while the most ingenious speculations of philosophy, even when aided by a partial reception and appropriation of the doctrines of the Bible, at every step have betrayed the grossest ignorance of man's original and actual condition, and of the only way in which his restoration can be possibly effected.

The Christian, in endeavouring to win men to the Saviour, may proceed in full assurance, that the plan which he developes and the offers which he makes, are in perfect accordance with the natural capacities and wants of those for whose salvation he is labouring, and under this encouraging conviction he may cry aloud and spare not, to the starving souls around him, "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good."

For let it be observed, that while the prophet shows the insufficiency of temporal enjoyments or advantages as means of happiness, he is far from leaving us to be content with this as a mere theoretical opinion, which can lead to nothing but a painful consciousness of want unsatisfied, and to that sickness of the heart produced by "hope deferred." But on the contrary, he makes the utter insufficiency of earthly good an argument, a reason, not for ceasing to desire,

which is impossible, and if it were not, would be wrong and foolish, but for fixing the desires upon other objects, good in themselves, and adapted to our nature. He assures the disappointed soul that happiness is really attainable; and while the last achievement of philosophy (falsely so called) is to make man acquiesce with a sullen apathy in the frustration of his dearest hopes, the gospel soars immeasureably higher, and assures him that his hopes shall not be frustrated; that there is a good as perfect, nay immeasureably more so than his fondest wishes ever yet conceived; a good, substantial and enduring, aye and satisfying too, at which he may, at which he ought to aim, and aiming at which he shall not be disappointed, because God invites him to desire it and to seek it, holding it out as an equivalent, a substitute, for that ideal and fallacious good, in quest of which he is exhausting nature and despising grace. To such, to all such let the voice of invitation come in tender and persuasive tones. Let all who are employed in the laborious, but vain attempt, to feed a spiritual nature with material good, hear God's voice like the voice of a compassionate father to his erring children saying, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

But is this all? Is this indefinite assurance that there is a good sufficient and attainable, the highest and best offer that the gospel makes to sinners? Must the soul, disappointed in its quest of earthly

good, be left to gaze at random on the infinite variety of possible contingencies by which the cravings of its nature may be satisfied? Alas! if this were all, the tender mercies of the gospel would be cruel. If the sinner is to be convinced of the unsatisfying nature of the objects he is actually seeking, only in order to be taught that there is somewhere in the universe an object truly worthy of his choice and suited to his nature, but without direction where or how he is to seek it; how can this tantalizing process be regarded as a favourable change, or one promotive of his happiness? If he is never to know more than this, that there is only one way of becoming blessed, and that he has missed it, it were better for him to remain in his delusion. But, my friends, if Christianity has ever left men in this state of mere negation, it is not because its Author or the word of God has thus revealed it, but because the heralds who were sent forth to proclaim it were mistaken in their own views, or unfaithful to their trust.

But the voice of God himself has no such "uncertain sound." He does not proclaim merely that there is salvation somewhere, and exhort mankind to seek it; but he leads them to it: he stands at the fountain of life and cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,—" to *these* waters. "Look unto *me* and be saved, all ye ends of the earth." "Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." He does not merely tell the wanderer in the desert that he has lost his way; he does not merely show him how he may regain it; but he stands, and calls him to come hither; Come to me; turn away

your eyes from every other object, and especially from those which have hitherto misled you; listen no longer to the voices which have tempted you astray, and which are still loudly ringing in your ears. Regard them not, for they would lead you downwards to despair and death. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." "Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live."

This direction of the soul to a specific and exclusive object as its only ground of hope and trust, without allowing any interval of doubt, or any liberty of choice, is a distinctive feature in the gospel system, and should never be forgotten in the dispensation of the grace of God by his ambassadors. The soul, when really convinced of its own error in resorting to the world and to itself for happiness, if suffered to remain without a fixed point of attraction and dependence, will infallibly revert to its abandoned idols, or to some new form of self-delusion, more incurable and fatal than the old, because adopted under the excitement of a groundless hope, and amidst the raptures of a spurious joy. The only safeguard against such delusions is a full exhibition of the one way of salvation, and in this as in other points already mentioned, we have only to follow a divine example. For the prophet, speaking in the name of God, after calling men to come to him, to hear him that their souls may live, annexes to this gracious invitation the specific promise of a sure salvation; a salvation not contingent or fortuitous, but one provided by a gracious constitution on the part of God himself; a salvation promised and confirmed by oath; a covenant of mercy, eternal

in its origin, and everlasting in its stipulations, comprehending in its wonderful provisions the essential requisite of an atonement, a priest and sacrifice, an all-sufficient Saviour; not a Saviour whose performance of his office should be partial, or contingent, or uncertain from the change of person, but the One, the only Saviour, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever;" a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec, the Son of God, the Son of man, the Son of David, who should sit upon his royal father's throne for ever, who was promised to the dying king himself, and of whom that expiring saint exclaimed, "This is all my salvation and all my desire!" It is to this exclusive object that the sinner's faith and hope are turned when God says by the prophet: "Incline your ear and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

Some suppose that Christ is here expressly mentioned by the name of David, an interpretation not by any means so arbitrary as it may appear to those who have not made themselves acquainted with the remarkable variety of names by which the prophets designate the Saviour. In the words before us, however they may be explained, there is an evident allusion to the promise made to David and recorded in the first book of Samuel, (7, 16,) "Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee, thy throne shall be established forever," viz., by the succession of Messiah, of whom it was said, before his birth, by a messenger from heaven: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and

the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1, 32. 33.)

It was in the prospect of this glorious succession, by which David was to live again and reign again forever, that the ancient prophets uttered some of their most cheering and sublime predictions: (Jer. 23, 5. 6.) "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is the name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness." In these words of Jeremiah, Christ is represented as a branch which should be raised up unto David; in those of Ezekiel which follow, he appears in the character of David himself: (Ezek. 34, 22. 23. 24.) "I will save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey, and I will judge between cattle and cattle; and I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their Shepherd, and I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them: I the Lord have spoken it." And again: (Ezek. 37, 24. 25.) "So shall they be my people, and I will be their God, and David my servant shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt;

they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children forever, and my servant David shall be their prince forever." These are clear cases of the application of the name to Christ, and will perhaps suffice to justify a like interpretation in the case before us, even in the absence of all parallel expressions in the writings of Isaiah.

There is, however, no necessity for any such interpretation, as the words here used, unlike those of Ezekiel, may be referred either to the future or the past; and because, if taken in their obvious meaning, as referring to the literal king David, they afford a sense good in itself and perfectly coherent with the context. There is less reason for departing from the obvious and common-sense meaning, because, in either case, the reference to Christ is clear, though more explicit in the one case than the other. On the one supposition, he is spoken of as David; on the other, as the great blessing promised to David. In the one case, the promise is: "Come unto me, and I will make you partakers of the blessings promised in and through the second David, the Messiah;" in the other case it is, "Come, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, securing to you the *sure mercies*, the blessings faithfully and irrevocably promised to the ancient David, all which blessings meet and terminate in Christ." In either case, therefore, the promise is specific, and the offer made is not an offer of salvation in the general or the abstract, but of free salvation through the blood of Christ.

Upon these two points in the offer of salvation, let us look with fixed attention. It is specific. It is

sure. It is not mercy in general that is offered, but the mercies of David, the mercies purchased by the second David, the mercies promised to the ancient David, which he hoped for, which he trusted in, and of which he could say: "this is all my salvation, and all my desire." It is this peculiar, special exhibition of God's mercy to lost sinners that is here held forth to them; it is this that he offers to make theirs by the provisions of an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David; for the blessing offered is not only definite but sure. It is a covenanted blessing, and it therefore cannot fail; it is a permanent blessing, and can undergo no change; it is a durable blessing, and shall last forever.

These two attributes or qualities of Christ's salvation, though to some they may appear of little moment, seem not so to the convinced, alarmed, and half-despairing soul, when after trying every source of natural enjoyment, but without obtaining rest or satisfaction, while the vast variety of objects sought and tried, serves only to distract and weary it. Hope faints and the heart sickens, till at last, through sovereign mercy, the inviting voice of Christ and of his servants gains access to the reluctant ear, and with the ear the eye is turned to that quarter whence the voice proceeds, and there, no longer roving among many objects, fixes finally on one, and there abides forever.

But to this concentration of the sinner's hopes, there must be added an assurance of security and constancy in that which he relies upon, or he can never rest. And this the gospel offers when it calls him to partake of "the sure mercies of David." It

is the glory of this great salvation that it is thus "sure;" sure, from the very nature of the change which it produces in the relation of the soul to Christ, and sure from the irrevocable oath and promise of a covenant-keeping God. When the soul is awakened to a sense of its condition, the first great object of its wonder is the depth and aggravation of its guilt, which seem to render its escape from wrath an impossibility. Soon its wonder is excited by another and a nobler object, by the revelation of the truth that God can be just and yet a justifier of the ungodly. Nor is this its last discovery, for after vainly struggling to acquire some legal right to the salvation which is thus seen to be possible, the soul is filled with new amazement as it forms at last a just conception of the glorious truth that this salvation is as free as it is full and efficacious, that none can taste of it at all but those who are content to purchase it on God's own terms, "without money and without price."

But even after this conception has been formed, and has become familiar, weakness of faith and a remaining leaven of self-righteousness will often lead to sceptical misgivings, and suspicions that, although the gospel method of salvation be a perfect one, and perfectly gratuitous, it may, like other favours be withdrawn, and he who rested in it, perish after all. But when it pleases God to throw the rays of his illuminating grace upon the soul and to dispel the clouds of ignorance and error which involve it, one of the first objects which stands forth to view in that self-evidencing light, is the unalterable steadfastness and absolute security of that salvation which is offered

in the gospel. It is there seen, too clearly to admit of doubt, that the believer's hope is founded, not at all upon himself, but altogether on another, and the merit of that other always the same and always infinite. This "great salvation" is as sure as it is free, sure as the merit of the Saviour and the covenant of God can make it, and may therefore well be called, as the prophet calls it in the text, "the sure mercies of David."

And is it not an interesting thought that the same sure mercies upon which the dying king so confidently rested, and in praise of which "the sweet psalmist of Israel" aroused the farewell echoes of his harp, that these same mercies are the song and rejoicing of the humblest convert in the darkest spots of Africa and Asia and the islands of the sea, and that on this same foundation are erected all the hopes of those who name the name of Christ in these ends of the earth?

Was this extension of the truth foreseen by David and Isaiah? or did they imagine, with their carnal and narrow-minded countrymen, that "Israel according to the flesh" should continue to monopolize the promises of God forever? There are some parts of Scripture where the promises of God are so exclusively connected with the name and local circumstances of his ancient people, as to furnish some apology, at least, for the pretensions of the modern Jews, and at the same time to divide interpreters, who harmonize in other matters, as to the question whether these predictions are to be literally verified hereafter, or have already been accomplished in a

figurative, spiritual manner. In all such cases it may be disputed whether the promise, in its original and proper sense, extended further than the Jewish Church; but in the case before us, the ungrateful necessity of such restriction is precluded by the language of the prophecy itself; for the attention of the thirsting, starving sinner has no sooner been directed to the Saviour as the Son and yet the Lord of David, than the prophet, speaking in the name of God, as if to encourage even us who are "sinners of the Gentiles" to confide in the same all-sufficient Saviour, says, "Behold I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

The connection leaves no doubt that Christ is here the subject of discourse. He was a witness of the truth, but an authoritative one, because he spoke what he did know: he spake on his own authority, not that of others; hence he was, at the same time, a leader and commander of the people. To the mere English reader, this important verse is shorn of half its meaning and of all its emphasis by the unhappy use of the word "people," which in English has no plural, to translate a Hebrew word not only plural in its form, but most emphatically plural in its sense. It may be given as a general suggestion to the readers of the prophecies in English, that in multitudes of cases, where the very thing predicted is the calling of the Gentiles, it is utterly obscured in the translation by this idiomatical defect of form in the equivalent selected for the word denoting "nations," a defect which cannot possibly have failed to render that illustrious event less conspicuous and striking to the mind

of the unlearned English Christian than to the readers of some other versions. In the case before us, the divine declaration is not merely or at all, that God had set Christ forth as a witness and commander to the Jews, but on the contrary that he had made him, by express appointment, a witness and a leader to the other nations, by whose convincing testimony and almighty power, God's elect were to be gathered out of every kindred, tribe, and people under heaven. Christ is a witness of the truth, a prophet, a divinely constituted teacher, not to this or that community or race of men, not even to God's chosen and peculiar people, but to nations, to all nations; and his office as a Prince of Peace and Captain of Salvation is no less extensive. To the nations generally he reveals the Father, and brings life and immortality to light. This wide extent of his official influence is furthermore expressed in what immediately follows, where the Father speaks of him no more in the third person, but addresses him directly, and assures him that his saving power should extend to nations which he knew not in his human personality, to nations which were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the old restricted covenants of promise. To the carnal Jews, this doctrine was a stumbling-block and foolishness, because they reckoned as political and natural advantages those means which God had used to prepare the way for Christ's appearance and the calling of the Gentiles. Hence they clung with impious folly to the means, when the end had been accomplished, and imagined in their blindness, that the system which they worshipped had

been framed for *their* sake, when the word of God on every page, assured them that its object was to glorify Jehovah; and that when this great end could be answered more effectually by the abrogation of the ancient system it should cease forever. And in view of that cessation, and of Him who should accomplish it by breaking down the middle wall of partition which divided Jews from Gentiles, it is here said of him, or directly to him, (v. 5,) "Behold, thou shalt call a nation which thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for he hath glorified thee." As Messiah was to glorify the Father by revealing him not only to the Jews, but to the other nations which had never known him, so the Father was to glorify the Son by making him a witness and commander of the nations, and by granting him a glorious accession from the Gentile world; by giving him the heathen for his inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; by inviting all the ends of the earth to look unto him for salvation, and thus making good to all who hear the call, the stipulations of that everlasting covenant which seals to all believers, without national distinction or respect of persons, "the sure mercies of David."

If, in addition to the doctrinal instructions of this interesting passage, we would learn from it a lesson in the art of invitation, let it be observed (1) that we must not address our invitations to a nature of which man is not possessed, but to his actual capacities and wants, admitting or assuming their reality and strength, and striving to convince him that they

never can be satisfied by any thing but that which is so freely offered in the gospel. (2) In the next place, let us see to it, that this great offer of the gospel be distinctly and specifically held up to the sinner's view, instead of suffering his mind to rest in a mere negative conviction that the world is not a satisfying portion, or allowed to roam at large in search of untried sources of enjoyment, which can never prove more lasting or abundant than those which have already been resorted to in vain. (3) Let no man be invited to a general indefinite reliance upon mercy as an attribute of God without regard to that particular and only way in which it can and will be exercised to fallen man; but let him be invited to a share in the provisions of that everlasting covenant which God has promised to bestow upon him.*

* A few pages of the conclusion wanting.

VI.

Isaiah 55, 6.—Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

In the preceding context these truths are taught: that there is an abundant supply for the spiritual wants of men; that this supply is suited to their various necessities; that it includes refreshment, strength, exhilaration; that the constitution of man's nature forces him to seek some satisfaction; that the multitude are actually seeking "that which is not bread," and cannot satisfy the soul; that instead of this, the gospel offers them "that which is good," and invites the soul to "delight in fatness;" that this offer is a free one; that the blessings offered may be bought, and must be bought, "without money and without price;" that they can only be obtained by hearkening to God, and coming unto him; that there is only one way of access to him; that this one way is opened by a covenant; that this covenant is "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," (2 Sam. 23, 5;) that the Mediator of this covenant is the Son of

David, the second David, the Messiah, in whom are fulfilled the promises made to the Son of Jesse, so that the mercies, which are secured to men through him, may well be called "the sure mercies of David;" that these mercies are not offered to the Jews alone; that Christ is the Saviour of the Gentiles also; that his office is that of "a witness to the nations, a leader and commander of the nations;" that however unlikely the extension of the gospel to the nations might appear, it must take place; that Christ will call nations which he knew not, and that nations which he knew not will run unto him; that this event must happen as an appointed means of glorifying God and doing honour to the Saviour.

All this was addressed, in the first instance, to the Jews; and now the prophet seems to press upon them the practical question—What then ought *you* to do? If God designs thus to save the heathen who have never known him, what effect should a knowledge of that purpose have on you, to whom he is well known? Shall the Gentiles enter the kingdom of heaven before *you?* Shall publicans and harlots press into the kingdom, while the very children of the kingdom, whose inheritance it is, are excluded? This would be a shame and a calamity indeed; but how will you prevent it?—by excluding *them?*—by gaining possession of the key of knowledge, and neither entering yourselves, nor suffering those who would to enter? This, if it were possible, would be the height of wickedness and folly. No; the true course is to enter with them, or, if you will, before them. Your true course is to seek the Lord, his favour, his protec-

tion, to call upon him, pray to him, confess to him, acknowledge him, and that without delay—before it is too late—now, even now—now, while he may be found, while he is near, while he is still your God by special covenant. If you would not see the heathen, whom you now despise, preferred before you, and received into the kingdom of Messiah, while you yourselves are shut out, use the only sure preventive—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

This view of the meaning of the text is perfectly consistent with the context, and with other passages in which this motive is presented to the Jews, as an inducement to be prompt and diligent in making their calling and election sure. But it may well be doubted whether this is the whole meaning. It may be doubted whether this is even the chief meaning. The terms of the text are in no respect more restricted than those of the preceding verses, and especially the first part of the chapter, which obviously relates to the wants of men in general, and the best way to supply them. If the invitation of the first verse is general, the exhortation of the text must be general also. If it is to all mankind that the prophet cries—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"—it is surely not to any one community or nation that he here says: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Besides, if this address be restricted to the Jews, the reason implied for the command is irrelevant. If the words "while he is near" denote "while he continues in a special covenant relation to the Jews," then the

command would seem to imply that by seeking the Lord and calling upon him, that peculiar exclusive covenant relation might be rendered perpetual, which was not the case. Or if, on the other hand, "while he may be found" denotes in a general way the possibility of finding favour and forgiveness at his hands, then the reason suggested is in no respect more applicable to the Jews than to the Gentiles. In this sense God was just as near to the one as to the other. The principles on which he would forgive and save, were just the same in either case. The necessity of seeking, the nature of the object sought, the way of seeking it, are wholly independent of external circumstances. As in the context, so here, the exhortation is addressed to all who are in need. It is therefore universal, or, at least, admits of a universal application. Even supposing that it has a special reference to the Jews, it is clear that the prophet says, and that, in imitation of him, we may say likewise, both to Jew and Gentile, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

I do not scruple to address the call to all who hear me. Are you disappointed and unsatisfied? then seek the Lord. Are you oppressed with a sense of guilt? seek the Lord. Are you careless and at ease? I warn you to seek the Lord. Sooner or later you will certainly seek him. However careless you may now be, the day is coming when you shall seek and not find; when you shall call upon him and receive no answer. There is a limit to the offer of salvation. If there were not, sin would be without control. If the sinner could suspend his choice forever, there

would be no punishment. The offer is limited to this life. And even in this life there is a limit. There is a day of grace in which men may be saved, and this day may be shorter than the sinner's lifetime. There is a time when God is near, and when he may be found. There must be a time, therefore, when he is no longer near, and is no longer to be found. Consider this, you who are now asleep in sin. From that sleep you must and will awake. You will either awake to righteousness or to despair. However deep your sleep may now be, and however long it may continue, you shall awake at last, and in your terror seek for God, when he is no more to be found, and call upon him when he is no longer near, when he is grieved, and has departed, when you shall "feel after him" in vain amidst the darkness which surrounds you, and shall be constrained at last to take up the sorrowful and bitter lamentation, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." If this be true, and it cannot be disputed, "seek ye the Lord while he may be found."

But how shall you seek him? Not in this or that locality. Regard not those who say: "Lo here, lo there;" but go to him in secret, make confession of your sins, renounce yourselves, accept the Saviour whom he offers, devote yourselves to him, and thus "call upon him while he may be found." Is this too much to ask of a poor ruined sinner, as the price of his salvation? But is this indeed all? Is no reformation, no change of life, required? Not as the meritorious cause of your salvation. It is purchased by another. But you cannot avail yourselves of it, and

continue as you are. You cannot be saved in sin. You may be saved from it. The same voice which says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," says likewise, (v. 7,) "Let the wicked forsake his way." He cannot continue in that way, and be saved. "No man can serve two masters;" but "whosoever committeth sin, he is the servant of sin." Between sin and holiness, between God and mammon, he *must* choose. The refusal to choose is itself a choice. To refuse to choose God is, in fact, to choose sin. In relation to this question there is no neutrality—there can be none.

If, then, the sinner would indeed seek God, he must "forsake his way,"—a common figure for the course of conduct. Life is a journey which may be pursued by many distinct paths; but the way of God and the way of sin lead in opposite directions. He who would tread the one, not only will, but must, forsake the other. How?—by a mere external reformation? No; the change must be a deeper and more thorough one. The law of God, which condemns the sinner's life, extends, not only to his outward acts, but to his thoughts, desires, dispositions, and affections. The moral quality of outward acts arises from the motives which produce them, and the reformation which the gospel calls for, reaches far beyond the mere external conduct. This is often an unwelcome discovery. Men are at first hard to be convinced that there is any danger in the course which they pursue. When this becomes too evident to be disputed, they are prone to cling to the idea that the gospel asks no change or reformation; and when this truth

can no longer be denied, they still delude themselves with the belief that the required reformation extends merely to the outward life. But this delusion is dispelled, and they are made to hear the voice of God not only saying, "Let the wicked forsake his way," but, "the unrighteous man his thoughts."

This is merely negative. It cannot be, that what God calls men to, is a mere negation, a mere abstinence. There must be something positive. There must be commands as well as prohibitions. The mere cessation of former habits would be insufficient; nay, it is impossible. An active being must have something to seek as well as something to avoid. Evil courses can be really abandoned in no other way than by exchanging them for good ones. If men would "cease to do evil," they must "learn to do well." This is a dictate of nature, of reason, of experience, of revelation. It is the voice of God himself who says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." The fact is assumed that all have departed from him. The words may seem strictly applicable only to backsliders—those who have falsified their own professions—who have apostatised from a voluntary visible relation to Jehovah, and who may with strict propriety be summoned to "return,"—to return to Him from whom they have "so deeply revolted." To any such now present I apply the words, however far you may have gone back in the wicked way which you appeared to have forsaken—however far your present thoughts may be from God and righteousness—I call upon you to give ear to God's rebuke and invitation:

"Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." This is your only hope, and even this may soon be gone; therefore, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

But it is far from being true, that this appeal is applicable only to backsliders. However strictly understood, it is appropriate to all mankind. It is true, the word "return" is used, and this word certainly implies departure from a previous state of nearness; and it may at first sight seem, on this account, inapplicable to the mass of men; for how, it may be asked, can they *return* to Him from whom they never have departed, but from whom they have always been wholly alienated? But this view of the matter is extremely superficial. It is true, most true, that the invitation to "return" implies a previous departure; and, can any departure be more real or deplorable than that which involves, not merely individuals, but the whole human family? The terms of the summons do indeed point back to that original apostasy under the curse of which the whole race groans. When the rebel is exhorted to return to his allegiance, the call comes with emphasis enhanced, not lessened, to the ears of those who are hereditary traitors, born in rebellion, inheriting the taint, and living in the practice of notorious treason: such is our condition. It is under this double burden that we sink; it is from this double penalty that we must be delivered; it is therefore to us all, without exception, that this solemn call is addressed—"Return unto the Lord"—"Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man

his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord." All who are aliens from your God, to you he says this day, Return! return! Return with penitent confession of your sins, with self-renunciation, with submission, with a solemn consecration of yourselves to God; but, above all, and before all, in the exercise of faith, believing in the Saviour, and accepting him as yours. This includes all the rest. Where this exists, they follow, as a thing of course; where this exists not, they are null and void, without worth, nay, without existence. In the exercise of this faith, and of that repentance which has never yet failed to accompany it since the world began, and of that zeal and obedience which can no more fail to spring from such repentance and such faith, than the fruit can fail to spring from the prolific seed, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord."

But what is the inducement to return which is here held out? It is man's part to forsake his evil ways and thoughts, to return to God, to seek him, and to call upon him. None of these will he do until God draw him. None of them can he do until God enable him. But this is true of every service which man ever renders. Though unable of himself to do these things, he is still bound to do them. It is his part to do them; and when he has performed his part, what does God promise in return? What will he do for man? He will have mercy upon him. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him." Mercy is

the inducement offered, and mercy is precisely what the sinner needs. Nothing else can meet his case but this. Without this nothing can be given, or, if given, can do him any good.

Mercy implies two things, misery and guilt. Innocent suffering may be relieved through pity, but it cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as an object of mercy. And, on the other hand, if guilt could exist unaccompanied by suffering, it might be pardoned, and the sinner might, in that sense, be said to obtain mercy. But, in strictness of speech, the term is applicable only to those cases in which misery and guilt coexist. And, alas for us! this is, without exception, the condition of man. No one sins without suffering. No man suffers without guilt. Individual sufferers may be innocent in reference to those who immediately cause their sufferings; and, on the other hand, guilt may, for the present, seem to be accompanied by pleasure only. But in due time both these false appearances will be removed. Every sin will be seen to be the necessary cause of sorrow, and every sorrow will be seen to flow more or less directly from sin. And, in the meantime, we have no need to look further than ourselves for objects upon which mercy may be exercised. In us, in all of us, the two prerequisites are found abundantly—misery present and prospective, the experience of it here and the dread of it hereafter—misery not produced by chance, but by ourselves—by sin, and that our own sin. To us, then, this inducement ought to be a strong one. To induce, then, "the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," and to "return

unto the Lord," it ought to be enough to know that that the Lord "will have mercy upon him."

But, alas! he is insensible of his condition. The more he stands in need of mercy, the more blind he is to that necessity. By nature, man is never prompted to implore God's mercy on account of his iniquities. He either asks nothing, or he cries for justice. While he is prosperous, and life seems long, he is content to remain always as he is. And when death stares him in the face, or any thing compels him to think seriously of his end, he assumes the character of injured innocence; he claims eternal life as the reward of his obedience; he appears before God not to plead for mercy, but to demand justice; and, with that demand upon his lips, or in his heart, he is often swept into eternity to get what he presumptuously asked for. Then, then, if not before, he cries for mercy; for that very mercy which he spurned before, and with that last despairing cry upon his lips, he goes "to his own place." Such is the end of those who presumptuously ask for justice and will not have mercy. But it often pleases God to undeceive the soul before it is too late. And then, when the sinner's eyes are opened, he beholds with wonder what he never saw before; he sees his own condition, his own guilt—the misery to which that guilt consigns him, and his utter incapacity to help himself. Ah, what a change takes place then in his feelings, and the tone of his addresses to the throne of grace. He who once called for justice at the hand of God, now sues for mercy. He who once stood erect, and said, "I thank thee, God, that I am not like other men," is now unable to lift so much as his eyes to

heaven, but smites upon his breast, and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Is it not better that this opening of the eyes should take place now than in eternity? "Seek ye the Lord then while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, *and to our God*." Do you observe that expression, "our God?"—the phrase by which the Jews expressed their covenant relation to Jehovah. As addressed to Jews, the phrase may be understood to mean, that God was still their God by a special engagement; and that, notwithstanding their departures from him, if they would forsake their evil ways and thoughts, and return unto him, he would have mercy upon them, as their God, as their own God, and fulfil the promises made unto their fathers.

But is there any such encouragement to us who are sinners of the Gentiles? May we return to God, not merely as an absolute and righteous sovereign, but as our own God, bound to us by covenant, who will not, cannot cast us off? Yes, we may, even the vilest sinner who forsakes his evil courses and returns to God, may trust not only in his sovereign mercy, but in the faithfulness of his engagements. Even such he is bound by covenant and by oath to save. Even the poor, benighted heathen, who has never been a sharer even in the outward privileges of the Christian church, may come and, as it were, lay claim to the salvation of the gospel, not in his own right but in that of another. Yes, my hearers, whoever you may be, and however ignorant of God and of salva-

tion until now, if you will but come to him, and come to him in the way before described, if you will but come to him, forsaking your sins and repenting of them, seeking him and calling upon him, and believing in him, then he is yours, your Saviour, and you have a right to say, not only that the Lord will have mercy but that our God will pardon. He will not only pity and relieve, but pardon; he will not only pity and relieve distress, but pardon sin. And this is absolutely necessary; without this there could be no real permanent relief.

There is no mercy opposed to justice. In the nature and the works of God, these attributes must harmonize. He cannot exercise mercy until justice be satisfied. He cannot be merciful to man until his justice is appeased. But justice demands punishment. And man, if punished, must be punished forever, because a finite being cannot exhaust the penalty of the broken law. How then can mercy be extended to him? Only by punishing another in his stead. In this substitution lies the sinner's only hope. God gives his own Son to be punished for him; not forever—ah! how would that impair the rapture of forgiveness and salvation; not forever—but long enough to answer the demand, through the infinite dignity and merit of the sufferer. In this way and in this way only, God can be just and yet a justifier. In this way he can pardon sin. In this way he will pardon all who come unto him. Is not this enough? Is not this a sufficient earnest of his willingness to save? "He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, shall he not with him also,

freely give us all things?" Come then, seek the Lord and call upon him, and that without delay. Seek him while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. The way you are in is a bad way—a destructive way, however it may now appear. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." But "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him."

What is there to prevent such a return? Does guilt stand in the way? He has provided for this difficulty. Guilt is itself a reason for returning. "He will pardon." Is your guilt too great? Too great for what? To be atoned for by yourself? Yes, it is indeed, even the least sin, such as you took no note of at the time, or have long since forgotten; even the least of such sins is too great for expiation by yourself, and unless otherwise atoned for, will rise up hereafter to condemn you, aye, will seize upon your soul and plunge it into endless ruin. You who are wont to say or think that you are not a great sinner, you shall yet be made to see that the most despised and trivial sin, as you esteemed it, is enough to slay your soul forever. But if you mean that your sins are too great for divine forgiveness, that is another matter. Even if pardon were a mere sovereign, arbitrary act of mercy, without regard to justice, you would have no right to limit the power and compassion of a God. Much less when pardon is in one sense really an act of justice, not to you but to another, when the penalty is paid and justice fully

satisfied for all believers. Is not this enough? Is Christ not great enough? Is his blood not rich enough? Were his pangs not keen enough to pay *your* debt, however great and overwhelming? Do you not see that the fountain which is opened for sin and uncleanness is the fountain of Christ's merit, and is, therefore, inexhaustibly abundant, so that God, for his sake, cannot only pardon, but abundantly pardon? —that Christ's atonement is sufficient in itself for all, however great the multitude, aye, and for all the sins of all whoever sinned, however many and however heinous? So that God, for Christ's sake, cannot only pardon but *abundantly* pardon? And he will, he will, if he pardons at all, "he will abundantly pardon." Oh, then, hear the voice of invitation, whether old, inveterate offenders or beginners in the ways of sin—whether the burden of your guilt be overwhelming or comparatively light—whether your minds have hitherto been careless, or alarmed about your state—you are all alike in danger and in need of speedy rescue. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

These last words are connected with what goes before, by the conjunction "for"—"*For* my thoughts, &c." To what is this "for" to be referred—of what does it assign the reason? Some have thought that

it relates to the national prejudices of the ancient Jews, to whom the calling of the Gentiles and the abrogation of the Mosaic system seemed impossible events, and to whom the prophet may be understood as saying—Do not imagine that because this dispensation has so long existed, it will last forever, or that because you are so blindly attached to it, I will not be willing to annul it when the time for its cessation shall arrive—"for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." But however good this sense may in itself be, it is far from being obvious in this connection, and refers the 8th verse to a remote and doubtful antecedent. Besides, as we have seen before, the terms of this whole passage cannot be understood as having reference merely to the Jewish dispensation. Even if that were the primary and obvious sense, we have abundant reason and authority to superadd another more extensive and more spiritual. But it is not the primary and obvious sense, as we have seen, and it is therefore necessary to connect the "for" with one of the clauses of the seventh verse. If with the first clause, then the eighth verse gives a reason for the call to reformation and repentance—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts—for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." Here the same two words are placed in opposition—"ways" and "thoughts"—let the wicked, &c.,—*i. e.* You cannot walk in my ways and the ways of sin; you cannot think my thoughts, and yet cherish thoughts of sin; sin and salvation are irreconcilable, and you must choose between them.

This is, to many who would fain escape perdition, "a hard saying." Having cherished the delusive hope that free salvation implies liberty to sin, they are painfully surprised at the discovery that God's ways and thoughts are wholly incompatible with theirs. They are afraid of hell, and they are willing to be saved from it, but that is all. That slavish fear is the sum of their religion. They must keep their sins. At first they plead for all sin, then for some; and as one after another is torn from them by the hand of the inexorable law, although their conscience, now enlightened, can no longer question or deny the truth, they hate what they acknowledge, they would gladly shut their eyes upon the light which has revealed to them this odious truth; and in the vain hope of escaping it, many, ah, how many, "draw back to perdition," and as they rush along that downward course, they still hear that gracious but inexorable voice crying after them, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die." I have given my Son to die for sinners, and all who come unto me through him I will abundantly pardon; but the wicked *must* forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways—there is, there can be no communion between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial. Ah, my hearers, God only knows in how many ears this expostulating voice has rung, and rung in vain; how many sinners on the verge of death have stopped their ears against it, or at most have paused and listened, with one foot upon the precipice, perhaps looked

back, and even wavered with a momentary impulse to return, and then forever disappeared.

But there are others whom divine grace has arrested, even those upon the dizzy verge of that abyss, and made to hear the warning voice, and see the saving light as it shines upon this fundamental truth, that sin must be forsaken or the sinner cannot possibly be saved. But this conviction often generates a new doubt of another kind—I see it to be not only true but right that sin must be left, or God cannot pardon; but can he pardon even then, or if he can, will he pardon, will he pardon me? Can he, will he, pardon so abundantly that I shall be included? This misgiving, under Satan's artful and malignant influence, would drive men to despair, unless the grace of God prevent. The soul admits the freeness and sufferings of Christ's atonement as a truth revealed, but rejects it practically against itself; it makes a merit of its unbelief, the cross fades from its view, its light begins to disappear, the invitations of the gospel are less audible, and at this crisis, some who did not sink before, sink now forever; but to others, when the voice of man is hushed, the voice of God becomes more audible—a voice both of reproof and encouragement —"Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." It is not man who pardons, it is God. It is not you who merit, it is Christ. As long as you stay away from him, nothing is pardoned, not even the least sin, it will sting your soul forever; but come, and all is pardoned, abundantly pardoned. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his

thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

Man may be unforgiving when he is not just. God can be just, and yet not unforgiving. Oh, glorious difference! Man can be himself unjust, and yet condemn the innocent. God can be just, and yet justify the guilty. Judge not God by man. Judge not his mercy by the compassions of his erring creatures. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Well, then, may he say to those who find such mercy too stupendous to be trusted in, "my thoughts are not as your thoughts," &c. God pardons nothing, or he pardons all. Let the convicted sinner cease to doubt—let him cease to linger, for any reason or on any pretext—let him cease to call in question either his danger or his guilt—let him cease, on the other hand, to make its greatness an excuse for unbelief or a pretext for despair;—but since he is in danger, imminent danger—since deliverance from it is so freely offered—since the grace which offers it is limited in time—since that grace will not save men *in* sin, but will freely save them *from* sin—since it will pardon sin itself to the believer, and whenever it pardons at all, will abundantly pardon even the chief of sinners—however foreign such forgiveness may be from human passions and human feelings, let the sinner hesitate and doubt no longer—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and

let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon: for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

VII.

PHILIPPIANS 3, 13. 14.—Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

WITHOUT attempting any formal exposition of the text or context, and without enlarging on the obvious allusion to the ancient games, from which the sacred writers borrow many of their strongest figures, such as that of *pressing forward* to a *mark* for a *prize* in the case before us, I propose to call your attention, for a short time, to the doctrine here suggested by the apostle's own example, and explicitly taught elsewhere, that religion in the heart is a progressive principle—a principle impelling to progressive holiness; and that not merely by a positive appointment, but from its nature, and the nature of the circumstances under which it operates—that this progressive character affords the only satisfactory evidence that piety exists at all, and is therefore necessary, not to an absolute assurance merely, but to a comfortable hope; and finally, that this new disposition to forget what is

behind, and reach forth to that before, is a chief source of happiness to Christians here, and is to be a large ingredient of their blessedness hereafter.

In alleging that progress is essential to true piety, it is not, of course, intended to affirm that this essential progress is at all times equally discernible and marked, or that it can at any time be measured step by step; but merely that the changes which the soul is ever undergoing are, in the case of true conversion, on the whole, in one direction--to deny which, on the ground of certain fluctuations, or because we cannot measure and compute the progress with unerring accuracy, would be as absurd as to remain upon the beach at the mercy of a rising tide, because the motion of the waves, when separately looked at, is not uniform. If it be true in this case, that in spite of all apparent reflux, the sea is still encroaching steadily upon the land, until it reaches that mysterious point at which God says to it, Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed; it is no less true that genuine religion in the heart, in spite of all its seeming fluctuations, rises and still rises, and that this rise must at some intervals, greater or smaller, become visible and palpable, and may not therefore be assumed at pleasure, when appearances, not only in some one case, but in every case, and always, are entirely against it. Let no man therefore judge his neighbour as a hypocrite, because he thinks he sees a retrograde movement as to some particular, or on some occasion; nor let any man adjudge himself a saint, and cherish the belief that the standard of his piety is rising in the gross when it is

evidently sinking in detail; but where we see another making progress from year to year, or month to month, if not from week to week, or day to day, let us thank God for the grace that is given unto him; and when, on the other hand, we find ourselves from day to day, or week to week, receding, let us not dream that at the month's end, or the year's end, the defect will cure itself, or even that past attainments will atone for future losses; but forgetting that which is behind, let us reach forth to that which is before.

The authority of Scripture is sufficient to establish that the fact alleged, as to the progressive nature of religion, is so. That it must be so, may be further argued from the nature of the subject in which the change is wrought—from the nature of the cause by which it is effected—from the nature of the means employed in its production—from the nature of the end designed to be effected—and from the nature of the change itself so far as it can be distinctly scrutinized.

And first, it may be argued from the nature of the subject, which is man, an active being, one essentially active. As the soul, anterior to conversion, was in progress, going from one degree of evil to another, strengthening its habits, settling its judgments, fixing its affections, so it may and must be expected to make progress in the new direction given to it, unless there be something in the very nature of a saving change adverse to such a process; but this, as we shall see, is so far from being true, that what may be said of the natural condition of the soul, may be still more emphatically said of its new state—that it cannot be

happy without progress; nay, that whether happy or not, it cannot exist without progress, because it cannot exist without some exercise of its powers and affections; and this very exercise gives strength, and this increase of strength is progress. Because man, then, is the subject of the change which takes place in conversion, there is reason to believe that the new character imparted to the soul will not continue as it is, but constantly become more marked and permanent.

The same thing seems to follow from the nature of the power which effects the change. If this effect could be ascribed to chance, or to a momentary impulse, it might be expected to continue as it is at first, or even to cease and disappear; but when the power of God, almighty and unceasing, is the sole efficient cause of what we call conversion, it seems unreasonable to suppose that that cause is to operate forever, or even for a time, with a view merely to the sustentation of these faint beginnings of a spiritual life which we experience within us. If the spark which grace has kindled had been left to itself, or to the feeble breath of mortals to preserve it, we might well suppose that nothing more than its continued existence was intended; but when we find an unbroken current of life-giving air from the breath of the Almighty brought to play upon that spark, we may conclude with safety that it was meant to glow and kindle to a flame, and that the flame was meant to rise and spread, and to become a conflagration; so that what at first was but a seed of fire, smothered in ashes, drenched in rain, or blown at random by the viewless winds,

shall yet light up the whole horizon, and dye the very heavens with its crimson.

Look again at the *means* which are employed for the implanting of religion in the soul, and judge by these whether it was intended to be shortlived or stationary. If we found no other means employed but those of a natural and ordinary nature, such as human wisdom might devise and human power set in motion, then we might plausibly infer, that what we now have in possession is the whole that God intended to bestow upon us, and might strive to rest contented with our actual attainments. But, my hearers, could it be to keep alive such piety as you and I possess, without improvement or increase, that God the Father gave his Son to die, and that God the Son assumed our nature, took our place, paid our debt, and bore our chastisement? Was it that you and I might be forever what we now are, even granting that our hopes of salvation were well-founded? Is it for this that the Almighty Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and though grieved from many a hard heart, returns and lights again that spark which sin quenched, and opens the blind eyes, and teaches the poor stammering tongue of the wretched sinner how to pray; yea, itself maketh intercession for him, with groanings, with groanings that cannot be uttered? Is there not in the seeming prodigality of means so infinite, so godlike, a presumptive proof that these effects which we experience are but partial and inchoate; that the end is not yet; and that it doth not yet appear what we shall, what we must be, to attain not only the great end of our existence, but the end

for which a sovereign God has moved all heaven and, as it were, poured himself out upon creatures? O my brethren, if such are the means which God has used to bring us thus far, we must not stop here, we must go on, we must go on, we must forget what is behind, we must reach forth to that which is before. Remember, too, that such an agent cannot use such means without a purpose, and an adequate purpose.

What then is the end for which this change is wrought, if wrought at all? Not mere deliverance from present pain. That does not always follow in fact, and if it did, would be wholly disproportioned to the power working, and the means employed. Not mere deliverance from future misery, for that is still inadequate. Not even man's restoration, though this is infinitely more and better than the others; but it is not all. If the ultimate end of all this were in man, he would usurp God's place: there cannot be two Gods—there cannot be two last great ends to be accomplished; it is all for God or none—it is for God—it is for God—it is for his praise and glory that the whole work is accomplished. And, my hearers, can it be that the whole tribute of our rational and spiritual natures to the honour of our Maker, is this feeble, faint beginning of spiritual life which we profess to feel within us? Is this all? O if Almighty power, and benevolence, and wisdom have provided a sacrifice of infinite merit, and a spiritual influence of boundless efficacy, and have brought these means to bear upon our miserable souls, not for our own sakes, but that God may be honoured by our restoration to the knowledge and enjoyment of the highest good;

where shall the limits of that knowledge and enjoyment be assigned, so long as God is God, his praise the end of our existence, and his desert of praise as endless as his being? O my hearers, if we are saved to honour God, and if we can never honour him enough, surely we may not, dare not think of remaining as we are, if that were possible. Surely, if we would answer the great end of our salvation, we must forget that which is behind, and reach forth to that which is before.

Once more the nature of the *change itself*, so far as Scripture and experience reveal it, shows that it is but an incipient change, and must be carried on forever. What does the change consist in? Not in any thing external, not in any thing corporeal, but in the mind, and yet not in the structure of the mind; not in the creation of new faculties or in the destruction of old ones, but in new desires, dispositions, and affections. These must have their objects, and their actings on these objects must increase their strength, enlarge their scope, and stimulate their energies. If God then has created new desires within us, or the desire of new objects, to wit, holiness, and truth, and God himself, and if these new desires from their very nature reproduce themselves, and if this process cannot possibly be cut short by the failure of the objects which are infinite, then surely from the very nature of the change which God has wrought upon us if we are converted, we not only may, but must go on. If we are changed at all, we must be changed still further. If we are not what we once were, if we have left as it were ourselves behind, we must forget our-

selves, we must forget what is behind, we must reach forth to that which is before. Thus from the nature of the subject of the change, viz., the soul of man; from the nature of the power by which the change is wrought, viz., the power of God; from the nature of the means employed, viz., the death of Christ to save from death and purchase life, and the influence of the Spirit to produce life in us; from the nature of the end proposed, viz., the endless glory of an infinite being; and from the essential nature of the change itself, consisting in such a new creation and direction of the powers as must necessarily result in spiritual progression; from all this, as well as from the express declarations of the Word of God, confirmed by the experience of all true converts, it is plain, it is certain, that whoever has come thus far, must go further; that no one may, or can rely upon, or be contented with, that which is behind, but must forget that which is behind, and still reach forth to that which is before.

It seems to me that these considerations are abundantly sufficient to evince, that the divine intention in effecting such a change as some of us profess to have experienced is, that we should go on further and forever glorifying God by new degrees of holiness and new acts of obedience. And unless we are prepared to disown the authority of that God who is not only our Creator but our Saviour, we must humbly acknowledge that a solemn and eternal obligation rests upon us, no matter what we have attained or may attain hereafter; to forget, in a certain sense, all that is behind, and to reach forth to that which is before. But it has pleased God to enforce those obligations

under which his sole authority suffices to lay us, by showing us how clearly our own interest depends not only on obedience to his will in general, but on submission to his will in this particular, and on a cheerful co-operation with it. In the case before us, this is clear from the fact, that if progress is essential to the very nature of a saving change, there can, of course, be no proof of its having taken place, in which this circumstance is not involved. The present is transitory; what is future now will be past in a moment, and so on forever. Before us and behind us stretch the future and the past. Our hopes and fears from their very nature have relation to the future, yet we seek to found them upon something in the past. Even while we lean forward with intense anxiety to scan the future, we still cast a longing, lingering look behind, at something there on which to fasten as a ground of hope. So, in seeking to satisfy ourselves that we have undergone the change which is essential to salvation, we accumulate and hoard up our experiences, even when their emptiness is proved by subsequent events: our native disposition is to trust in that which is behind, whereas the Scriptures teach us to tread upon it, that we may rise higher, and instead of believing that all will be well hereafter, because we thought that all was well some time ago, to grapple with futurity itself, to hasten towards the consummation of our course, not by recalling what we once thought and felt, but by thinking now and feeling now as God requires us to think and feel with respect to what is coming.

We are like one sailing down a rapid stream, in-

tensely anxious as to the issue of our voyage, and fearful of the dangers which await us, and yet turning our backs on both, and trying to derive encouragement from gazing at that portion of our course already past, and every moment growing less and less visible. Of what avail, to such a mariner, is even a distinct view of some distant point long since swept by, when his vessel is approaching some perilous pass, or passing through some vast and foaming estuary into the deep sea. O surely it is then time to forget what is past, and to bend forward, to reach forth to that which is before. My hearers, we may please ourselves with other proofs of piety, but if we would be well assured that we have moved at all from our original position, we must move still further. We may spend our lives in measuring or guessing at the distance passed already, but the strongest assurance of our having come to any given point in the appointed course, is furnished by our travelling beyond it to another. Are you doubtful whether you have come as far as you imagine? then go further. Are you doubtful whether you possess as much religion as you fain would think? then try to possess more, and the attainment of the greater will involve the attainment of the less. To you especially, my hearers, who believe that you have lately found the entrance to the way everlasting, and yet can scarcely believe you have passed through it, make assurance doubly sure by leaving the entrance door afar behind you. If you would have a satisfactory persuasion that the world, and the flesh, and the devil are forsaken, you must attain it not by standing still, and

looking at your past course either with complacency or doubt, but by forgetting that which is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before.

God, by making this the only solid ground of confidence that you are saved, has shut you up to the necessity of progress, has compelled you to move on, if you would know and be assured that you have moved at all. And thus he brings your personal anxieties, and care for your own safety, to enforce the obligation of a duty which, although you could not utterly neglect it, might have been too carelessly performed. Not only because God commands it, but because you cannot otherwise be sure of your conversion, you must learn to forget that which is behind, and to reach forth to that which is before.

But there is yet another way in which the same thing is accomplished. All that has just been said would be true, if stagnation or repose in religious life were possible. I have hitherto proceeded on the supposition that the only alternative is progress or stagnation; that the worst which can befall the soul which will not go on is, that it must stand still. And I have tried to show that even then it would be aggravated sin and folly not to advance. But O how unspeakably is this conclusion strengthened by the fact which I have hitherto left out of view, that there is no such thing as standing still, or resting on your oars. Forward or backward, up or down the stream, you must and will go. Yes, my hearers, reason and experience but echo the instructions of God's word as to this momentous truth, and I call them both to witness, to set to their seal, that God is true, when he

declares that from him that hath not, *i. e.* hath not more abundantly, who does not gain, who does not make advances, shall be taken away even that he hath.

It would be easy to show from the very constitution of our nature, and the circumstances in which we are placed, the reason of this universal fact; but I choose rather to appeal to your experience, and ask you when you ever wilfully neglected or ceased to use the means of improvement without a positive deterioration. Let us take it for granted, as we safely may, that the choice is not between onward motion and repose, but between onward motion and recession. Will the convalescent choose to be a convalescent all his life, instead of seeking to regain his health? Does he not know that unless he soon regains it, he may look for a relapse, and for peril of death greater than before. He does, he does, and so may you, my hearers. God has shut you up to the necessity of going on, by limiting your choice to that or going back; by showing you that motion cannot be avoided; that you must rise or sink; that you must grow worse or better; that you must draw nearer to God, or be driven further from him; that you must love him more than you do now, or love him less; that you must go on and live, or go back and die; that however unprepared you may have been for the necessity now laid upon you, however far you have been from foreseeing the solemnity and peril of the juncture where you now are, it is even so, it is too late to seek another choice, another alternative; you are shut up forever to this one, you must either forget what is before, re-

trace your steps, repent of your repentance, and go back to that which is behind; or, on the other hand, forgetting that which is behind, you must reach forth to that which is before.

And now, my hearers, how are you disposed to regard this law of the new life, which forbids not only retrocession but repose; which insists upon perpetual progression, and accepts of nothing short of this progression as conclusive evidence of its own existence? Are you ready to say, as the disciples said of old, "this is a hard saying, who can hear it?" Are you ready like some of them to go back from the Saviour and walk no more with him? Ah! consider what you do, and if such thoughts rise within you, crush them, I pray you, in their very birth. For I assure you that this, so far from being cruel, is a merciful economy, required not only by God's honour but your interest; a dispensation tending purely and directly to your highest happiness in time and in eternity, so that if you could but see its operation and its issue you would rather die than be subjected to a different constitution, *i. e.* one which should allow you to go backwards and to stagnate instead of urging you forever onwards. And you would thus choose, not because you felt yourself constrained to sacrifice a present and inferior good for a greater one still future; not because you were enabled by Divine grace to forego all ease and happiness at present, lest you should finally come short of it forever, but because you would perceive in this "hard saying," this inexorable law of progress, an exhaustless source of purest satisfaction, an unfaltering incitement to ex-

ertion, an abundant consolation under trials. Yes, the trials of the Christian would be hard indeed to bear, bitter alike in blossom and in fruit, if it were not for this new-born and immortal disposition to know more, to do more, to rise higher, to grow better, to grow more like God, to approach nearer to him, and the accompanying disposition to regard the past, not past sins, but past attainments, as a mere fulcrum, a mere stepping-stone, a round upon the spiritual ladder, by which higher things may be attained.

But this conviction, reasonably as it might be founded on the daily experience of its efficacy even in the least affairs of life, cannot be felt in all its strength until it is obtruded, forced upon the mind, by the working of the self-same principle in great emergencies and critical junctures; as for instance when the mind is first awakened by the Spirit to a sense of sin. Remember, O remember, when that light first beamed into your soul with an intolerable brightness, and you saw yourself, your heart, your past life, your innumerable sins, set before you in a light which you could neither bear nor shut your eyes upon. Recur to that point of your spiritual history, recall the feelings which that retrospect produced; the shame, the sorrow, the remorse, the self-abhorrence, and I do not ask you whether you could then have consented to remain in that abyss of filth and darkness where you saw yourself to have been rolling till the voice of God aroused you, and a light from heaven showed you your condition; for with such views that would be impossible. You could not thus repent of your repentance, and become your former self again. But I

ask you whether you could have consented, or whether you can wish that you had been left to languish and to stagnate till the end of life; not indeed within that slough, but just without it, on its verge, in sight of it, in sight of nothing better; safe, safe, but only safe without the power or desire of onward progress; chained for a lifetime to the contemplation of what you had been; forced to look upon the hideous corruption of your former state, without relapsing into it, but at the same time without getting further from it than at the moment of your actual deliverance; a shipwrecked sailor chained to the rock on which he had found refuge; a convalescent leper, bound at the threshold of the lazar house, whose poison he had been for years inhaling. Could you have borne it? No, my hearer, you could not.*

* The conclusion of this sermon is wanting.

VIII.

Luke 18, 1–8.—And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

All is not easy that appears so to a hasty, superficial observation, which is apt to mistake the simplicity of strength for the simplicity of weakness. The most wonderful discoveries, when once made, may seem obvious. The highest creations of genius appear level to the humblest capacity. The profoundest wisdom often shows no more surface than the shallowest folly. Of this the parables of Christ are eminent examples. Many a sage and scholar has neglected them as only fit for children. Others have looked upon them as befitting themes for first attempts and young beginners in the work of exposition. The best corrective of this error is experiment. As

few have failed to entertain it, few, perhaps, have used this means without being undeceived. What appeared at first incapable of two interpretations, is successively subjected to a dozen. Whatever this may argue with respect to the interpreter, so far as the Scriptures are themselves concerned, it is not a fault, but a perfection.

These divine discourses were intended to accomplish more than one end, and to this variety of purpose their structure is adapted with an exquisite precision. Some were to see clearly, more were to be dazzled. They were also meant, at least in many cases, to be variously applied. A lesson crowded with allusions to the actual condition of our Lord's immediate hearers, is often so constructed that these very points enforce its application to a thousand other cases wholly different externally. Either from this or other causes, there is sometimes an illusion, like that produced by a painting, seen from a certain point of observation, while from any other it is a distorted daub. The imagery of the parables, when seen from a particular distance, may be definite in outline, faultless in perspective, perfect in colouring. But approach a little nearer, and the figures lose their symmetry, the tints their richness. This is often a key to the correct mode of exposition. It forbids the coarse manipulation of the little-souled grammarian, no less than the cloudy indistinctness of the speculative dreamer. It compels the one to stand back, and the other to draw near, until they both see neither too much nor too little, but precisely what they ought to see, and must see, if they would see to any purpose.

In this way, some of the most valuable lessons may be learned as to the folly of over-refinement and extravagant minuteness in the explanation of strong figures.

But sometimes this advantage seems to be precluded or diminished by a doubt as to the general design of the whole parable. This doubt may extend to the very doctrine taught, or be restricted to its application. The truth embodied in some parables is plain, but it may be questioned whether it is predicted of the Jews or the disciples, or some other class exclusively, or meant to be applied to men in general. In other cases, both the doctrine and the application may be clear; but there is something obscure in the mode of illustration, an apparent incongruity between the substance and the shadow. This appearance often springs from a misapprehension of the image or its use, and then occurs one of those instances of self-interpretation which have already been mentioned. As soon as the true principle is once applied, the incongruity is gone. This proves the principle itself to be correct, and furnishes, or may furnish, valuable aid in solving other cases.

To this last class belongs the parable from which the text is taken. There is no indistinctness in the images themselves, nor any doubt as to what they were designed to represent. The widow and the judge stand out before the mind's eye as fully and clearly as the forms of flesh and blood which we remember seeing yesterday or expect to see to-morrow. The widow's wrong, the judge's wickedness, his equal scorn of God and man, the prayer, the refusal, the re-

turn, the ceaseless importunity, the selfish tyrant's reasoning with himself—all this is like an object of sense. We do not merely read—we see, we hear, we feel it as a real, present living spectacle.

The moral, too, is not left to be guessed at or inferred; it is explicitly propounded. This parable was uttered for a certain end, to teach a certain lesson, to produce a determinate effect; and that was, that they who heard it should pray always and not faint, not give up, or desert their post—the Greek word having properly a military sense and application. As to the length which we may go in applying it, the only question that has ever been raised is, whether it had a special reference to the prayers of Christ's disciples after he should leave them, till he came again for the destruction of their nation. But even if it had been so intended, it is one of those cases where the lesson taught to one class is evidently universal in its nature and the purpose of the teacher.

This is the more certain here because the terms used are so comprehensive, and without any qualifying adjunct. "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that it is right or binding to pray always." If, then, there is any obscurity or doubt, it is neither in the images presented, nor in the doctrine taught, nor, to any practical effect, in its application. But it lies in an apparent incongruity between the illustration and the thing which it illustrates. This may be rendered palpable by placing type and antitype over against each other. That the elect of God should be represented by the wronged and helpless widow, agrees well with the fact and with the usage of the Scrip-

tures. But the prayers which these are bound to offer without ceasing, must be prayers to God; and, therefore, he would seem to be the object corresponding to the judge of the parable.

But this judge is an unjust judge; he neither fears God, nor respects man. He has no restraining motives either here or hereafter. In addition to this general habitual corruption, he is actually guilty in this very case of gross injustice. He is faithless to his trust in refusing to discharge the solemn duties of his office. He perverts the right by constantly refusing to redress the wrongs of the injured. When at last he consents to do so, it is from the meanest and most selfish motive. It is merely to escape trouble and annoyance. "Lest by her continual coming she weary me." Between this character, this conduct, and this motive for a change of conduct, on one hand, and the reasons for our importunity in prayer, upon the other, what connection, what resemblance, is there or can there be?

To some the difficulty may seem hopeless, as their rules of interpretation force them to admit that the unjust judge is here a type or representative of God as the hearer of prayer, and that being such, there must be a minute resemblance of the type and antitype. There have been those who would not scruple to assume and carry out this monstrous notion. They would say, perhaps, that the resemblance is a limited specific one; that God resembles the unjust judge only in his turning a deaf ear to the petitions of his people, and in granting their requests because of their unceasing importunity. In order to sustain this view, they are

compelled to extenuate the guilt of the unjust judge, and to exaggerate the supposed resemblance between him and God, lest the comparison should be revolting.

But this is utterly at variance with the drift and with the terms of the description. Why is it said that the judge was an "unjust" one? Why is it said that he "feared not God, neither regarded man"? These terms prohibit all extenuation. They are evidently added for the very purpose of determining the character. Injustice and contempt of God and man, are not incidentally mentioned; they are prominent. They do not modify the character; they constitute it. It is as an "unjust judge" that he is held up to our view; and, lest we should mistake his quality, we are told that he neither feared God nor respected man. This accumulation of condemnatory phrases makes it certain that the wickedness of the judge is an essential stroke in the description. The idea evidently is, that the worse we make him out, the better we shall understand the parable. We cannot, therefore, substitute a merely careless, sluggish, or forgetful judge, much less a weak, but honest one, without destroying all the point and meaning of the apologue.

How, then, are we to reconcile this seeming incongruity? How can the conduct of this selfish tyrant to a helpless sufferer, be any illustration of a just and merciful God's dealing with "his own elect"? One thing, at least, is certain, that in this, and by parity of reasoning in all like cases, it does not follow, because two things are compared in one point, that they must be alike in every other; nor even that they must

be alike in all the points which are specifically mentioned. For neither the character in general, nor the conduct in this one case, nor the motive for reforming it, can possibly have any counterpart in the divine nature or dispensations. The only points of contact are the mutual relation of the parties as petitioner and sovereign, the withholding of the thing requested and its subsequent bestowal. In all the rest there is, there can be no resemblance; there is perfect contrariety.

Why, then, was this unsuitable image chosen even for the sake of illustration? Why was not the Hearer of Prayer represented by a creature bearing more of his own image? Why was not the judge of the parable a conscientious, faithful magistrate, who, though compelled to put off a compliance with the prayer of the poor widow, still designed to grant it, and allowed her to come often and return unsatisfied, in order that her wishes might be kept upon the stretch until it became possible to satisfy them? Because this would not have answered our Lord's purpose, but would only have taught feebly by comparison what is now taught mightily by contrast. The certainty of our prayers being answered could not possibly be strengthened or evinced by any similar proceeding upon man's part. The ground of confidence here furnished is not the similitude of God to man, but their infinite disparity. The argument implied is not, that if imperfect goodness goes so far, that perfect goodness must go further; but, that if a certain good effect may be expected to arise fortuitously out of what is evil, it may surely be expected to arise necessarily out of what is

good. If even such a character, governed by such motives, may be rationally expected to take a certain course, however alien from his native disposition and his habits, there can be no risk in counting on a like result where all these adverse circumstances favour it.

This view of the parable, or of the reasoning involved in it, as founded not on mere comparison, but contrast, does away at once with the necessity of strained constructions and unnatural refinements. Instead of trying to exculpate the unrighteous judge, or even to extenuate his guilt, we are at liberty, or rather under the necessity of, taking the description in its strongest sense. The worse he is, the better for the beauty and effect of our Saviour's illustration. We are also freed from the necessity of seeking points of fanciful resemblance between this ideal person and the Father of Mercies, to whom all flesh come as to the Hearer of Prayer. When the object is no longer to assimilate, but to distinguish and confront as opposites, we may give the language of the text its full force, without any fear of blasphemy or even of irreverence.

The three main points of the antithesis are these —the character, the practice, and the motive of the judge—his moral character, his official practice, and his motive for acting upon this occasion in a manner contrary to both. His official practice is intimated by the word unjust applied to him near the conclusion of the parable. If this were meant to be descriptive merely of his inward dispositions, it would add nothing to the previous description. It refers more

probably to the habitual discharge of his functions, to his exercise of power. He was not only destitute of any love to justice or any wish to do it, but unjust in practice. The interior source of this exterior conduct is then described in other terms. He feared not God. He neither reverenced him as a sovereign, nor dreaded him as an avenger. Without this fear, justice is impossible. He only can command who knows how to obey. He only can direct the fears of men to right and wholesome uses, who is himself governed by the fear of God. A judge who "fears not God," is of necessity an "unjust judge."

But this, though decisive of the real character, is not necessarily so of the outward conduct. If the acts of men were always an unerring index of their moral state, the world would be a very different world from what it is. If human society depended for its temporal advantages exclusively on genuine virtue, it would soon come to an end. There are appearances of goodness which, although abominable in the sight of God, are highly esteemed among men, and for that very reason, have a social, civil or political value, wholly irrespective of their moral worth or worthlessness. These outside virtues, having no pure fountain in the heart, must spring from other sources. They are not the fruit of politic contrivance and collusion, being only overruled for civil ends by Providence. Their real source is in the selfishness of those who practise them.

Among the motives which may act upon this principle, not the least potent is the fear of man. This may include the dread of his displeasure, the desire

of his applause, and an instinctive shrinking even from his scorn. Shame, fear, ambition, all may contribute to produce an outward goodness having no real counterpart within. This is particularly true of public and official acts. How many magistrates and office-bearers, who have no right principle to guide or check them, are controlled by a regard to the decencies of life, to the conventional exactions of society, in short, to public sentiment. Such fear not God but man. They can brave the terrors of eternity, but not the nearer retributions of the present life. They can consent to risk their souls, but not to jeopard their respectability. Under the influence of this selfish but most salutary fear, they do what they would otherwise leave undone, and abstain from what would otherwise be done without a scruple.

There would thus seem to be three grounds for expecting justice and fidelity in human society, and especially in public trusts. The first and highest is the fear of God, including all religious motives—then the fear of man or a regard to public sentiment—and last, the force of habit, the authority of precedent, a disposition to do that which has been done before, because it has been done before. These three impulsive forces do not utterly exclude each other. They may coexist in due subordination. They may all be necessary to a complete official character. The first in that case, must control the others, but the others, under that control, may answer an important purpose. The man who fears God, does not, on that account, despise the judgment of his fellows, though it cannot be to him the ultimate, supreme rule of his conduct.

The same is true of a regard to settled usage, or even to personal habit, when correctly formed. Indeed, these latter motives never have so powerful an influence for good, as when they act in due subordination to the fear of God. It is only when this is wanting, and they undertake to fill its place, that they become unlawful or objectionable. And even then, although they cannot make good the deficiency in God's sight, they may make it good in man's. Although the root of the matter is not in them, a short-lived verdure may be brought out and maintained by artificial means. In this case, the defect is one which cannot be supplied. But even where the secondary lower motives fail or cease to act, the consequence may be unhappy. The most conscientious man, who disregards the public sentiment or tramples on established usage, may do far less than he might have done, though far more than the demagogue who lives on popular applause, or the precisian who acknowledges no higher law than custom. The want of any one of these impulsive forces, may detract from the completeness of the ultimate effect. How much more the absence of them all!

If the judge, for instance, who is governed by the fear of God, and pays due respect to the opinion of mankind, may fall short of the standard, through a want of fixed habit, or contempt of settled usage; if he who, in addition to this, sets at nought the judgment of his fellows, sinks still lower in the scale, how low must he sink who has not even honesty, much less, religion to compensate for his minor errors! In other words, how utterly unjust must that judge be

who neither fears God nor regards man. It seems then, that the few words which our Saviour uses, are so happily chosen and so well applied as to exhaust the subject, by affording a description of an absolutely worthless judge, on whom none of the ordinary motives to fidelity have any influence, and from whom nothing, therefore, can be expected. What could be more hopeless than the case of the poor widow at the feet of such a tyrant? If he knows neither fear nor shame—if there is nothing to restrain him either in the present or the future—if she has not the means of appealing to his avarice—how clear it seems that his refusal to avenge her is a final one, and that continued importunity can only waste time and provoke him to new insult.

I dwell on these particulars to show that, in their aggregate, they are intended to convey the idea of a hopeless case. The petitioner was helpless—she was poor—she was at the mercy of her enemies. The judge was habitually unjust, and uninfluenced, either by the fear of God or by respect for man. What is this but to say—and to say in the most graphic and expressive manner—that the case is hopeless—that her importunity is vain? And yet she perseveres; so have thousands in like cases. Why? Because there is nothing more to lose, even though there may be nothing to hope. And there always is some room for hope. For hope does not depend on certainties nor even probabilities, but on possibilities. When there can be no change for the worse, and a change for the better is even barely possible, men will hope, from the very constitution of their nature. When the

widow's case is said to be hopeless, it is not said with respect to her own feeling, but with respect to any rational, appreciable ground of hope. She hopes against hope. An indomitable instinct triumphs over reason. She persists in her entreaties. So have thousands.

The ideal case was meant to bring before us a familiar practice. It is equivalent to saying, Men in such situations still confide in the effect of importunity. When every thing seems plainly to forbid it, they persist, because success is possible, and on that possibility the natural repugnance to despair exerts itself. Yes, even in the most discouraging condition, men will pray to their fellow-men, so long as there is a possibility of having what they ask. And in this perseverance they are often justified by the event. Of this fact too, the widow's case is but a type. With every reason to cease praying, she prayed on and she was heard at last. When every higher motive failed, a lower one was still available. She could not bribe but she could weary him. He who neither feared God nor regarded man, was tenderly mindful of his own ease. He did not say, "lest God be angry" or "lest man despise me," but he said, "lest by her continual coming she weary me." This might have seemed a frail foundation for the hope of the petitioner, or rather it would never have occurred to her as likely to decide her case, and yet, on this it turned at last. Lest she should weary him he did her justice. Her continued importunity was therefore justified by its success. She did well in continuing to urge her claim, however little reason she might

have to look for its success. The widow in the parable and those of whom she is the type or representative, do right, act reasonably in thus persevering, even where the case seems desperate and every rational consideration is in favour of abandoning the suit.

There is often a divine art in our Saviour's parables, by which we are led unawares to pass judgment on ourselves. This is sometimes recorded as the actual effect produced upon the unbelieving Jews. But the effect is often still more general. It arises partly from the peculiarities of structure which have been described. The indistinctness of the images presented, seems at times to be intended to disguise the final application of the lesson till its truth is fully recognized. In this way the Pharisees were made to utter their own sentence, and in this way we too may become our own judges without knowing. The simpler, the more natural the case supposed, the more tremendous is the force of its recoil upon the real object.

In the parable before us, we are all led irresistibly to own that the widow's persevering application to the unjust judge was rational and right, although apparently the case was hopeless. Though there seemed to be nothing in the character, the habits, or the circumstances of the judge, on which a reasonable expectation could be founded, yet we know that she was right, because she gained her end, and that not by accident, but in a way entirely natural and likely to occur again. The true force and application of the parable may best be shown by varying the ideal case presented, first a little, and then more, until it merges in the real case it was intended to illustrate.

The conclusion which we have already reached is, that the widow in the parable did right, acted a reasonable part, in hoping against hope, and still persisting in her suit when every thing combined to prove it hopeless. If so, the converse of the proposition must be true; and by abandoning her suit or suspending her entreaties she would have been chargeable with folly and with sin proportioned to the interests at stake. If it had been her own subsistence merely, that would be enough to condemn her dereliction, how much more if that of others were dependent on the same decision. She would have had no right to sacrifice the comfort and tranquillity, much less the life or the salvation of her children to her own despondency or weariness of effort. All this is certain, and will be at once admitted in the case which the parable supposes, to wit, that of an unjust, unmerciful, and selfish judge, "who feared not God neither regarded man."

But let us suppose that he had been an upright, conscientious, faithful judge, whose execution of his office was delayed by some mistake or want of information. How much less excusable would she have then been in relinquishing her rights or those of others in despair! Suppose again that there had not been even ignorance or error on the judge's part to make the issue doubtful, but that his decision was delayed by temporary circumstances which were likely soon to have an end. The case would then be stronger still, and the folly of abandoning the suit still greater.

But advance another step. Imagine that the grant-

ing of the widow's prayer had been deferred for the sake of the petitioner herself, in order that the favour when obtained might be enhanced in value. Suppose that instead of knowing that the judge was in principle and habit unjust, she had known him, by experience, to be just and merciful, as well as eminently wise. Suppose that she had been protected by him, and her wrongs redressed in many other cases. Suppose that she had, even in the present case, his promise, nay his oath that justice should be done her. How easy must it then have been to trust! How doubly mad and wicked to despair!

There seems to be room for only one more supposition. Those which have been stated, from the lowest to the highest, all imply the *possibility* of error or delinquency, however strong the reasons for expecting the actual exercise of wisdom and integrity. But now remove this possibility. Exclude all chance of intellectual or moral wrong. Enlarge the attributes before supposed, until they reach infinity or absolute perfection. What then would be left as the foundation or the pretext of a doubt? The bare fact of delay? Under this pretence, suppose the suitor to despair and to renounce his suit. Is not this indeed a case of madness, too extreme to be supposed? because it could not occur often, even if it occurred once. Alas! my hearers, this extreme case is our own. It is to this view of ourselves, that the consummate wisdom of the Master brings us by a way that we knew not. Just so far as we practically doubt the promises of God, or fail to use the means of his appointment, we reverse the conduct of the widow in

the parable, and that too under the most aggravating circumstances. If she was wise in hoping against hope, what must we be in despairing against evidence?

From this conviction we perhaps take refuge in the false view of the parable before exposed. We would fain deny the possibility of arguing from one case to the other. For this purpose we exaggerate and multiply the points of difference. She asked for justice; we for mercy or free favour. Her judge was unjust, impious, and reckless; ours is the infinitely Holy God. She gained her end by exhausting his patience; but "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary." How then can we be either bound or condemned by her example? Because she at last wearied an unjust judge into doing right in order to escape a worse annoyance, what ground have we to hope that we can weary the Most High into compliance with our wishes? It need scarcely be said now, that this is not the true state of the case. The true state of the case is this. If she would have been chargeable with sin and folly in despairing of justice from an unjust, impious, and reckless judge, who feared not God neither regarded man, what may we be charged with if we despair of mercy, freely offered, dearly purchased, clearly promised, on the part of God himself? If she was right in trusting to the selfish love of ease in such a man, how wrong must we be in distrusting the benevolence, the faithfulness, the truth of such a God!

Every point of dissimilitude between the cases does but serve to make our own still worse and less

excusable, by bringing into shocking contrast men's dependence on the worst of their own species, with their want of confidence in God. For what the widow in the parable did, all men do substantially. They will not be deprived of any temporal hope, however great the human wickedness which seems to crush it. On the contrary, they will not, in a multitude, alas, a vast majority of cases, be persuaded to trust God, and to prove their trust by importunity in prayer, however ample the encouragement, however strong and unequivocal the promise.

The extensive application of the lesson here taught is apparent from the nature of the principles involved. It is impossible to feign a case at all analogous, to which it may not be as properly applied as to the one expressly mentioned. The only grounds of limitation which have ever been suggested, are the supposed reference to the downfall of Jerusalem, and an alleged restriction of the parable by Christ himself to the specific grant of *vengeance* on the enemies of His elect. The first has been already shown to be really no limitation, even if the primary intention were the one supposed. The other rests upon a twofold misconception. In the first place, the avenging here meant is judicial or forensic vindication; the redress of wrongs endured, and the assertion of disputed rights. The adversaries meant, as appears from the form of the original expression, are the adverse party in a case of litigation. There is no allusion, therefore, to the gratification of malicious or revengeful passions. In the next place, even if there were, it would belong to the type and not to the antitype,

and be no better reason for restricting the import of the passage, than the fact that the petitioner is represented as a widow. Because the ideal judge says, "I will *avenge* her, lest by her continual coming she weary me," our Lord, adapting his expressions to the case supposed, says, "Shall not God do likewise; shall not he *avenge* his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" This evidently means, shall he not at last hear their prayers, though he long defer an answer? So instead of saying, Yes, he will surely hear them, he still retains the costume of the parable in answering his own demand: "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily," *i. e.*, he will do what they ask more certainly, because for reasons altogether different, and from motives infinitely higher than those for which the unjust judge consented to avenge his helpless but importunate petitioner.

But how shall it be speedily, when by the very supposition it is long deferred? Because the longest term of expectation, when surveyed by an eye of faith, and not of doubt or jealous apprehension, will be short enough to the believer; and because continued expectation of the right sort, while it fortifies his faith, is constantly diminishing the period of its exercise. If we really believe that God will grant us our petitions, we shall gladly acquiesce in his appointed time, and own, when he "avenges" us, whether it be sooner or later, that he did it "speedily." The only question is, have we that faith, to which, as to the Lord himself, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day?" The

only difficulty of the case is in ourselves, and hence the Saviour winds up his divine instructions with a "nevertheless;" *i. e.*, notwithstanding the immense weight of preponderating reasons for implicit confidence in God, expressed by importunity in prayer—notwithstanding the gross folly, and the aggravated guilt of that despondency which "casts off fear and restrains prayer before God"—though the faith required is so simple, so reasonable, so delightful—is it common, is it ever to be universal? The reasons for believing are the most complete and satisfactory conceivable. "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" This solemn question comes home just as really to us, as if we were to meet the Lord on earth to-morrow. And if we would answer it aright let us remember that the faith in question is a faith that must be proved and exercised by prayer; so that if men would either have it or demonstrate that they have it, they "ought always to pray, and not to faint."

IX.

2 Kings 17, 33.—They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"—"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," are two of Solomon's most pregnant maxims; * or rather two forms of the same, which is again repeated in the book of Psalms. † The word "beginning" in all these cases, may be strictly understood as having reference to time. This is the point from which all successful students of true wisdom must set out. Their first lesson is to fear the Lord. If they cannot learn this, they can learn nothing, to any valuable purpose. They can no more attain to high degrees of wisdom without this, than a child can learn to read without a knowledge of the alphabet. This comparison, however, like all others, ceases to hold good at a certain point of the application. The elementary knowledge, with which the culture of the child begins, is afterwards left far behind, as something which no longer claims attention. But in spiritual culture the first elements of knowledge and its ultimate attainments may be said to be identical.

* Prov. 1, 7: 9, 10.

† Psalm 111, 10.

"The fear of the Lord" is as really the end as "the beginning of wisdom," although not in such a sense as to exclude progression, and a vast variation of degree in the experience of one and the same person.

"The fear of the Lord," which is thus both the alpha and omega of the spiritual alphabet, may be taken either in a generic or a specific sense. The former is, in fact, coextensive with the general idea of religion or true piety, including, either directly or by necessary inference, every right disposition and affection on the part of man, as a dependent and unworthy creature, towards the infinitely great and holy God. All such affections may be readily deduced from fear, in its specific sense, as signifying not a slavish but a filial feeling, not mere dread or terror, which, from its very nature, must be always tinged with hate, or at least with repugnance, but a reverence impregnated with love. This genuine and spurious fear of God, unlike as they may seem, and as they are, have often been confounded, on account of their having something really in common, to wit, a sense of God's power, and an apprehension of his wrath as awaiting all transgressors of his will. But this common element, which justifies the use of the word fear in reference to both these dispositions, is blended in the one case with a consciousness of alienation and hostility, while in the other it is lost, as it were, in the feeling of attachment, confidence, and common interest. The varying proportion, in which these distinctive qualities are blended with the fundamental property of fear, determines the facility with which a filial awe may be confounded with a slavish dread.

To discriminate between the two might sometimes be impossible, but for a practical criterion or test which the Word of God has laid down, in accordance with our Saviour's fundamental rule of moral diagnosis, "By their fruits ye shall know them." In one of the passages which recognize the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, it is closely connected with obedience to his will. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do them, *i. e.*, his commandments." * "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments." †

This intimate connection between genuine fear and obedience is recognized in the law itself, when Moses warns Israel "to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear the glorious and fearful name, The Lord thy God." ‡ The negative aspect of the same truth is exhibited by Job, when he winds up his sublime inquiry after wisdom with the solemn declaration, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." § Here then is the touchstone of a genuine and a spurious fear of God. The one disposes us to do his will, from a sincere complacency and acquiescence in it. The other prompts us rather to resist it, except so far as our compliance may seem necessary to escape his wrath, which is the only real object of this slavish dread. The one is a fear of punishment as the consequence of sin; the other a fear of sin itself, as intrinsically evil, or, which amounts to the same thing, as opposed to the will of

* Psalm 111, 10. † Psalm 112, 1. ‡ Deut. 28, 58. § Job 28, 28.

God, and to his very nature, which is thus assumed as the ultimate criterion of right and wrong, of good and evil. Only a filial fear disposes men to *serve* God. Selfish and slavish fear disposes them to flee from him. This uneasy sense of insecurity would be relieved and gladdened by the assurance that there is no God; whereas the same assurance would be anguish or despair to the affectionate and reverential fear of the believer. These two things, then, are to be regarded as inseparable, the fear of God and service of God. He who will not serve God does not fear him, *i. e.*, in any good sense of the term. His fear, so far as he has any, is a slavish fear; and slavish fear is never free from some admixture of hostility.

This distinction, however obvious as it is in Scripture and familiar in experience, is not practically recognized by all men. There seems to be a natural propensity to look upon fear, blank fear, as the essence of devotion, as the whole of what is due to God, the rendering of which absolves from all obligation to believe, to trust, to love, or to obey. Among the heathen, this idea of religion is perhaps predominant, or certainly far more prevalent than we frequently imagine. It may well be questioned whether their deities are ever the objects of their love, excepting in those cases where the god is but a personification of some darling lust. Beyond this homage rendered to the unchecked sway of their own appetites and passions, there is strong reason for believing that their devotion is nothing but the tribute of their fears to a superior power which they hate, and which they look upon as hating them. The service rendered under

the influence of such a motive, is in no case more than they regard as absolutely necessary to secure them from the wrath of the offended godhead. If they could be convinced that less would gain their end, they would joyfully diminish the amount, and still more joyfully receive permission to withhold it altogether. But this complete immunity is rendered unattainable by conscience. They feel that they are guilty, *i. e.*, justly liable to punishment, and cannot rest without an effort to escape it.

But this universal and unconquerable sense of guilt may coexist with an indefinite variety of notions as to the means of propitiation, and the extent to which those means must be applied. Some men may feel it to be necessary to expend their whole time in appeasing the divine wrath; but by far the greater number, under every known form of idolatry, consider less than this sufficient, and rejoice to appropriate the residue to self-indulgence. They give no more than is extorted by their fears, and have no conception of religious service as a voluntary, cheerful, joyous consecration of the whole man to an object which he venerates and loves, and in the doing of whose will he finds his highest happiness. The only service of this free, spontaneous, and absorbing nature that the heathen devotee pays, is the service rendered to himself, in the indulgence of his own corrupt desires. He gives even to his chosen idol only what he is unable to withhold, his fears; and by so doing proves himself a stranger to all genuine religious fear, which cannot be divorced from the willing and devoted service of its object.

I have stated this as a grand practical error of the heathen, in order that we may be able to judge of it impartially, and not at all because it is confined to them. Of men in general it may be affirmed, that they are prone to separate religious *fear*, in their conceptions and their practice, from religious *service*, and by that separation to convert the former into a slavish dread, as far as possible removed from the filial reverential fear of genuine devotion. Whether the proffered object of their worship be the true God or a false one, they naturally slide into this error. Hence it is that the majority of men adore their god or their gods with a divided heart, and try to obey two masters, *serving* whatever they love best—the world, their fellow-creatures, themselves; *fearing* whatever they believe can punish or destroy them, which for that very reason they consider as entitled, not so much to love as hatred. Wherever conscience is at all awakened, and religious means, no matter what, are used to pacify it, it will be found a brief but just description of the multitude thus influenced; that they *fear* one thing and *serve* another. To the judge and the avenger they give what they must, and lavish all the rest upon themselves, their pride, their malice, their ambition, their insatiable appetites, their raging passions.

An apt illustration of this general truth is afforded by a singular and interesting passage of the sacred history. The king of Assyria had carried into exile the ten tribes of Israel, and supplied their place with settlers from his own dominions. These were heathen, and brought with them their own idols and idolatrous

rites. Having no knowledge of Jehovah, whom their predecessors had professed to worship, even under the forbidden form of golden calves, they had, of course, no fear of his displeasure, till he sent wild beasts among them, and slew some of them. Regarding this correctly as a penal visitation from the god of the land, they procured from their own sovereign the assistance of an Israelitish priest to teach them how to worship him. He accordingly taught them, as the narrative expresses it, "how they should fear the Lord," and they acted promptly upon his instructions. They took care, however, to provide gods of their own, each tribe or nation for itself, while at the same time they offered to Jehovah a worship of fear prompted more by the recollection of lions than by faith or reason. "So THEY FEARED THE LORD, AND SERVED THEIR OWN GODS." How far the sacred writer was from recognizing this as any genuine religious fear at all, we learn from his saying, in the very next sentence, "unto this day they do after the former manners; "THEY FEAR NOT THE LORD." Why? Because "they feared the Lord, and served their own gods."

We may be disposed to smile with some contempt at the absurd and inconsistent conduct of these wretched pagans. But wherein did their folly and their sin consist? Certainly not in being afraid of the displeasure of Jehovah and in seeking to avert it; for in this they acted wisely. But it lay in their imagining that forms of worship, extorted from them by their selfish fears, would be sufficient to propitiate the Most High and secure them from his vengeance;

while their voluntary service, their cordial and habitual devotion, was expended on his enemies and rivals. If this is the absurdity which we condemn, our judgment is a just one; but let us impartially condemn it wherever we may find it, whether in ancient or in modern times, whether in eastern or in western climes, whether in heathendom or Christendom, whether in our neighbors or ourselves.

To facilitate this self-denying process in your case and my own, let us look for a moment at some ways in which precisely the same folly, and with incomparably less extenuation, may be practised and is practised now in the nineteenth century, and here, amidst the blaze of gospel light. Let us not shrink from the unwelcome truth, if it should be discovered that this race of idolaters is not extinct; that "unto this day they do after the former manners;" fearing the Lord and serving their own gods; "as did their fathers, so do they unto this day."

To make the transition easier from the heathen to the Christian world, we may begin with our own heathen, the heathen at our own doors, in our own streets: I mean those who approach nearest to the heathen both in the positive and negative circumstances of their spiritual state, their ignorance of truth, and their enslavement to sin. Look at the worst part of your population, as it pours its turbid streams along in times of more than usual excitement; hear its muttered or vociferated curses; mark the bestial character of its propensities and habits. All this you have seen, and as you saw it, you have been disposed perhaps to say that here, at least, there is no divided worship or

allegiance; here, at least, are men who serve their own gods, but who do not, even in profession, fear the Lord. No, in profession, certainly not; in form, in purpose, not at all; but do you think they never fear him, *i. e.* feel afraid of him? Be not precipitate in drawing such conclusions.

In the vast mixed multitude of those whom you regard as the most ignorant and reckless and besotted of your countrymen, observe, on some occasion of extraordinary concourse, how many haggard faces, and contracted brows, and strangely gleaming eyes encounter yours. Do you believe all this expression of anxiety and dread to be the fruit of poverty, or sickness, or domestic cares? If so, you are mistaken; for the same expression may be seen in those who are not poor, who are not sick, or outwardly distressed at all; and on the other hand, its absence may be marked in thousands who are poorer and who suffer more from care and sickness than do any of those whom you are observing. There is something back of all these causes to produce this uniformity of countenance, and I will tell you what it is—IT IS FEAR. Yes, even the boldest and most insolent defier of all outward peril, the foolhardiest provoker of temptation and destruction, at the very moment when he is repelling, with vindictive rage, the charge of cowardice, is often chilled with fear, unqualified, unmitigated fear; and that of the most paralysing kind, because it is a vague fear and of an invisible object—a fear which is written in the face of some as legibly as on the brow of the first murderer. We sometimes speak lightly of the fear of ghosts and phantoms as a childish folly; but it is often noth-

ing more than a disguised fear of the great avenger; the man shrinks and trembles as seeing him who is invisible. Tell him of storms and earthquakes, and he shudders, though the danger be distant or long past. Tell him of sudden casualties, and he turns pale, though the same form of accident, in *his* case, be impossible. Tell him of pestilence, of fever, plague, or cholera, as slowly, steadily approaching, and judge for yourself whether the emotion caused by this announcement can be all referred to dread of bodily suffering or even of death as a physical change only. No, his thoughts run onward to the dread tribunal where he is to stand, and to which this may be his summons. What he now feels is that "fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation," which the apostle represents as following the obstinate rejection of an offered Saviour. I do not mean that this is always present to the mind; it may be rare, it may be momentary. These forebodings may but occasionally interrupt the ordinary current of the thoughts and feelings, like a dark cloud swept across the sun, or a lurid flash, making darkness visible. The attempt to banish such reflections may be commonly successful, and the man, instead of being weaned from his accustomed cares or pleasures, may plunge into them more madly and more desperately, for the very reason that he wishes to avoid these fearful premonitions. He may never cross the threshold of a church—he may never look between the covers of a Bible—he may shrink from the touch of a religious book—he may run from the presence of religious men as he would shun contagion—but he has that within

him which he cannot flee from or forever silence; he is guilty and he knows it, and he knows that God will punish sin, and that his own time may be near at hand; and often, in the intervals of business, or the necessary lulls of his tempestuous enjoyments, in the silent watches of the night, or on a sick-bed, or when some affliction forces him to serious reflection, he hears that whisper which he heard in childhood; a mysterious voice syllables his name, as it has often done before, and mutters of some fearful secret soon to be disclosed. Nay, the same unwelcome premonition sometimes reaches him when all around is gay and joyous, in the very moment of indulgence, with the cup of pleasure at his lips, he hears that sound; he knows not whence it comes, he sometimes even knows not what it says; the very vagueness of the warning makes it more terrific. His very ignorance of God and of religion adds a strange, peculiar terror to these pangs of conscience; and the man, however brave at other times, is really afraid; he fears, he fears the Lord, although he knows him not; he fears him as the unseen and anonymous avenger who has followed him through life, and now awaits his death; and if, in spite of all this, he still plunges deeper into worldly cares or sensual indulgence, and vainly strives to seek oblivion from them, this only shows that, like the settlers of Samaria, he fears the Lord and serves his own gods.

The case of which I have been speaking is the case of those who are excluded, or exclude themselves from the operation of all ordinary methods of religious influence—who are not permitted, or refuse

to hear the gospel—who avoid association with its preachers and professors—and who lead a heathen life on Christian ground. Such may well be likened to the foreign idolaters who occupied the territory of the ten tribes, in immediate juxtaposition with the chosen people; and in such it may not seem surprising or unnatural that, like their prototypes in history, they should fear God and serve the Devil. But is such a compromise or combination possible within the precincts of the church itself—within the bounds of even nominal Christianity—among the decent and respectful hearers of the gospel and professed believers in its truth? Can *they* be charged with this stupendous folly of dividing or multiplying what they worship—giving half to good and half to evil, believing half in truth and half in falsehood, living half in light and half in darkness? Perhaps the very form which I have given to the question, may suggest an answer, by presenting no exaggerated picture of the life which some of us are actually living.

You fear the Lord; you are unwilling to provoke his anger; you acknowledge your obligation to serve him, and you discharge that obligation by attending on his worship; but is he the master that you daily serve? Where is your treasure and your heart? By whose will do you regulate your life? A man may so far fear the Lord as to frequent His house, and join in the external acts of worship there; but what if he has other gods at home, and there bows down to Mammon or to Belial? What if the world is in his heart, and the prince of this world on the throne of his affections? Will the stain of these habitual idolatries be

washed out by patiently enduring the penance of a Sabbath service? Will the Lord, who is thus feared with a slavish dread of his displeasure, be contented, for the sake of this, to pass by all the rest—all that is done, or all that is not done, in defiance of his absolute authority and positive command? My hearers! let us not deceive ourselves. There *are* idol-temples sometimes reared against the very walls of Jehovah's sanctuary. There are heathen oracles which give forth their responses "fast by the oracle of God." There are those who seem to fear the Lord on one day in the week, but during all the rest of their existence are unceasingly employed in serving their own gods.

The charge which is here brought is not one of *hypocrisy*. It is one of *delusion*. I do not say that those of whom I speak pretend to fear the Lord when they know they fear him not. I say that they *believe* they fear him, when in *fact* they fear him not. Or rather, which is really the same thing in another form, they *do* fear him; but it is not with a fear which honours, or conciliates, or pleases him, as they imagine; and here, just here, is their delusion. They are *sincere* enough in thinking that they fear God; but they are terribly mistaken in supposing that they fear him as they ought. This is a painful truth to those of us whom it concerns; but it is one which, sooner or later, must be told. And it requires not many words to tell it. It may be summed up in this short sentence: If you do not *serve* the Lord, you do not *fear* him. You may attend upon his worship, you may respect religion, you may believe the Bible to be true, you may hope to be saved through Christ, you may expect to die the death of the righteous.

But how do you live? How are you living now? From what source is your present happiness derived? What influence do you exert? What are you doing, not as a weekly recreation, or a mere periodical solemnity, but as a daily business, for the honour of God and the good of your fellow-men? If your fear of the Lord shows itself in these particulars, and in the constant dispositions and affections of your mind, it may be genuine. But if you fear God only in the church, or only on the sabbath; if your life, beyond these bounds, is atheistical; *i. e.*, if you live precisely as you would if you believed that there is no God; if your fear of him is nothing but a natural unwillingness to suffer at his hands, and a consequent desire to avert his wrath; if you joyfully redeem from his service what you can, to be expended on the world; if you come before him reeking from the sordid cares or frivolous pleasures of a selfish and unprofitable life, and then leap back from the threshold of his presence into the hot and steaming atmosphere of that same world from which your fears had detached you for an hour or a day;—if this is your experience, or any thing like this, however clear it may be to your own mind that you fear the Lord, it is still more clear to others that you serve your own gods. Is not this an object of compassion? Has this delusion no share in the pity which we lavish on the heathen? Yes, to those really enlightened there is something peculiarly pitiable in the state which I have been describing. The degree of knowledge really possessed, and the hopes so fondly cherished, only render their inevitable disappointment more

affecting to the heart of one who can foresee it. Looking out from the inner sanctuary into which he has found access by the blood of the everlasting covenant, he compassionates not only those who still wander in the court of the Gentiles, but those who have penetrated into the interior enclosure, within sight of the laver and the altar of atonement, or have even found their way into the holy place, and there continue, unsuspicious that the holiest of all is still beyond them, that the mercy seat is not yet reached, and that, without this, neither the loaves spread upon the golden table, the light that streams from the golden candlestick, nor the incense that rolls upward from the golden altar, can be theirs, or made available for them; that notwithstanding their near bodily approach to God, they are still far from him;—over such a sight the true penitent might weep even in the presence of the ark and under the shadowing pinions of the cherubim. Especially might this be the effect if these deluding worshippers were seen leaving their idols at the entrance of the temple, and casting many a fond backward glance at these beloved objects from the holy place, or even bringing them in, half concealed, beneath some flimsy pretext, or some fair appearance, and then hastening forth to worship them; yes, scarcely waiting till the veil has again fallen on the sacred scene, before they drop down in the dust before the gods of their idolatry. This, this is a spectacle to draw tears at the very mercy-seat and under the cloud of the divine presence. But, sad as is this, would to God it were the worst! It were surely enough that we, who profess to have found

access to the mercy-seat, should be compelled to sorrow over those who, though externally almost as near it as ourselves, are still, in heart, as far from it as ever, and who serve their own gods in the presence of Jehovah. But what if our lamentations should be interrupted by a voice from the holy of holies, saying, "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God!" * What if the cloud should rise or open, and disclose to us the fearful sight of idols in immediate contact with the ark of the covenant and the mercy-seat itself!

This is no hideous imagination of a wild impossibility. The thing supposed is not impossible at all. It is a palpable reality. It has been, is now, and will be hereafter, until human corruption ceases to exist, or is no longer suffered to exert an influence on true believers. False gods may be brought into the holy of holies. I speak not now of false profession, or of total self-deception, but of those who give evidence of having really passed from death unto life. Even these may cling to idols; even these may give themselves to other masters; even these may fear the Lord and serve their own gods; and in so doing, I should hesitate to intend the possibility of Christians, even by profession, being tainted with the poison of a literal idolatry, did not notorious contemporary facts demonstrate the existence of this monstrous combination. In proof of this, we need not go to India, and contemplate the connivance of a Christian government at heathenish abominations, and its violation of the rights of Christian consciences, in order to maintain those of

* 1 Peter 4, 17.

a heathen population, which it ought to have enlightened in the knowledge of the truth. We need not join in the censure which the world has passed upon these false concessions, or attempt to trace the marks of the divine displeasure in the blood and ashes of that great catastrophe, the sound of which has not yet died away in Europe, Asia, or America; because, admitting all that is alleged, or even all that is conferred, and rating at the highest mark the guilt of such connivance or encouragement, it cannot, after all, be justly charged with actual participation in the idolatry itself, but only with a sinful and pernicious toleration of it, on the part of those who really despised or pitied it, as the wretched but incurable delusion of a half-enlightened and inferior race. But what shall we say of those who, nearer home, and in a Christian country, and amidst the light of a reformed and purified religion—nay, perhaps with the profession of it on their lips and on their conscience, can sanction by their presence, or sustain by their pecuniary gifts, a worship which, though nominally Christian, they confess to be idolatrous—crowding its sanctuaries even with their children, led, perhaps, by simple curiosity, but strengthening the faith of others by example, and themselves incurring the tremendous risk of learning first to tolerate, and then to admire, and finally to worship what at first they viewed with wonder and contempt. Be not surprised, my brethren, if you should encounter such phenomena in your fields of ministerial labour; and if you do, be not afraid to tell those who exhibit them, that such compliances, so far from being justified by simultaneous or alternate

acts of purer worship, or by the continual profession of a purer faith, are thereby only brought into a closer and more hideous assimilation to the mixed religion of these ancient settlers in the land of Israel, who, in that consecrated soil, and not far from the temple of Jehovah, almost in sight of its majestic rites, and within hearing of its solemn music, while they owned the true God as a God of judgment, and experienced his wrath as an avenger—were so mad upon their idols, that with fatal inconsistency "they feared the Lord, and served their own gods."

But, returning to the figurative spiritual meaning of idolatry, with which we are immediately concerned, and to its fearful combination with the worship of the true God, which I have described as introducing idols into the most holy place—as a complete enumeration of these idols would be neither possible nor needful, let me sum up a vast number of them under the collective name, so often used in Scripture, of the world—the world, including all the various and complex influences exercised by men, not only as detached individuals, but as an aggregate body, called society—the various allurements by which true Christians are seduced into compliance with its questionable practices. It may be under the pretence or in the hope of doing good, without experiencing evil—the oldest and most specious of the arts by which the tempter has achieved his conquests, since he whispered in the ear of Eve, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," and displayed to her the fatal tree so "good for food," so "pleasant to the eyes," and so "desirable to make one wise." Here is an idol temple—vast, magnificent, in-

viting, at the very threshold of our churches,—nay, out of which idols are continually brought into Jehovah's presence, not by false professors merely, but by deluded worshippers, who fain would fear the Lord, and worship their own gods.

But what are the gods which may thus be served by those who, at the same time, seem to fear the Lord? Leaving wholly out of view, as I have said, the case of those who worship self and the world, under the mask of hypocritical profession, or the fatal spell of "strong delusions," let us look exclusively at those who seem sincerely to *fear* God, but who do not *serve* him with a perfect heart, because their affections are divided and seduced by idols. What are these idols? I might almost say, their name is Legion. I can mention but a few of them. But leaving these and other more familiar forms of this idolatrous delusion, let us glance at some less palpable, and more compatible with light and even genuine profession. Such is the idol of self-righteousness, a very different thing from self-indulgence. While the latter owns no obligation to obey any other master than its own imperious lusts, the other recognizes God's authority, consents to do his will, and thinks it does it—yes, and makes a merit of it. Its very reliance, or professed reliance, on the merit of the Saviour, is transformed into an idol, and usurps the honour due exclusively to Christ. It submits to the righteousness of God in order to exalt its own. Of such it may be said, without injustice, that they fear the Lord, and serve their own gods.

Closely allied to this idol is another—the idol of

spiritual pride—a disposition to exult in the extent and depth of our religious experience, and in the variety of our attainments, a complacent estimate of our own love to God, a zeal for his honour, and submission to his will, as meritorious achievements of our own, and not as the gratuitous products of his sovereign grace. Alas! how many sincere Christians are led far astray by this insidious seducer, till at last they seem to fear the Lord still, but to serve their own gods.

To the same race and family of idols belongs that pharisaical censorious spirit which regards the essence of religion as consisting in vindictive opposition to the sins of our fellow-men, and imagines that the surest way to rise in the divine life is to lower our neighbours, whether saints or sinners, drawing a morbid satisfaction from this painful view of others as no better than ourselves, and expending on this object the attention which might better have been given to our own defects, or better still, to the desire and pursuit of excellence. This, too, is to fear the Lord and serve our own gods.

Further enumeration is superfluous. It is enough to know the general fact that such things are possible, are real. If we do know it, and acknowledge it, what shall we do next? Let judgment begin at the house of God. Let every image which defiles it be cast down without mercy from its pedestal and dashed in pieces, like Dagon on the threshold of his temple. Let us, like Jacob and his household, put away our false gods, before we come to Bethel to renew our vows. Instead of weeping over the delusions of our

neighbours, let us first seek to have our own dispelled. Let those who gaze from without into the temple of the Lord, or from its holy place into the holiest of all, be under no mistake, or even doubt, as to the object of our worship. Through the cloud of incense which ascends from our altar, let not even the unfriendly or malignant eye detect the semblance of an idol placed above it. Let friends and enemies alike be constrained to acknowledge that our Lord is one Lord, and that we his people have no other gods before him. Then, with our consciences cleared from dead works, to serve the living God, we shall be able, with consistency and good hope of success, to say to those who hear the gospel with us, but have not yet avouched the Lord to be their God—Forsake your idols, crucify the flesh, die to the world, serve him whom you fear already, fear him no longer with a slavish dread, but with a filial reverence, believe in him whom we trust as our Saviour—"Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following; for this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Yes, and then with this accession to our strength, we may go forth beyond the precincts of the sanctuary into the highways and the hedges of the world, in search of those neglected and bewildered outcasts who are trembling at the presence of an unknown God, who have fearful forebodings of his wrath, with no cheering anticipations of his mercy, fearing the Lord, and serving their own gods. Yes, even these may be compelled to come in, to join the pro-

cession of experienced saints and recent converts from the world, as it draws near to the footstool of God's mercy, and pointing to the fragments of forsaken idols which lie strewn around it, say, "O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise; thou hast visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."

X.

PHILIPPIANS 4, 13.—I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

CHRIST is revealed to us in various characters; that is to say, the relation he sustains to his own people is presented under various figures. Sometimes he is represented as their redeemer, who sets them free from bondage; sometimes as their prophet, who instructs them; sometimes as their king, who protects and governs them; sometimes as their priest, who makes atonement for them; sometimes as the sacrifice itself, which is offered for them; sometimes as their friend, sometimes as their physician, sometimes as their provider, sometimes as their strengthener. It is in this last character that he is presented by the text, which may be considered as expressing not only the personal experience of Paul, but of all who are partakers of the "like precious faith." In this character it well becomes us to contemplate Christ. We all need strength; we all need one to strengthen us. Whether conscious or unconscious of our weakness, we *are* weak. Our very strength is weakness. We

may trust it, but the more we trust it, the more completely shall we be deceived. This is a defect which no effort of our own can supply. We have not strength enough to be strong. The exertion of weakness cannot produce strength. Imbecility, nay, impotence, in spiritual matters, is a part of our hereditary curse. We must look out of ourselves for its removal. And to save us from a vain search in forbidden and unsatisfying quarters, the word of God sets Christ at once before us as our strength, our strengthener. What Paul says, every true believer, in his measure, has a right, and is disposed, to say: I can do all things through Christ enabling me. Of myself I can do nothing; but through Christ I can do all things, all that is obligatory, all that is necessary, either for my own safety, for the good of others, or for the honour of Christ himself.

In further considering this gracious aspect of our Saviour's character and work, as a source of spiritual strength to those who have no strength in themselves, it may be conducive to the clearness and distinctness of our views, if we inquire (1) how he strengthens us, and (2) for what he strengthens us, *i. e.*, in what particular emergencies, or in reference to what specific objects.

First, then, in what way, and by what means, does Christ strengthen us? I answer, negatively, not by miracle or magic, not by acting on us without our knowledge or against our will, but through our own intelligent and active powers. I answer positively, and particularly, in the first place, that he strengthens by instructing us, enlightening our minds in the

knowledge of himself and of ourselves, and especially by making us to feel our weakness and to understand its causes. He shows us that it is a moral weakness, and connected with a universal moral depravation, involving all our powers and affections, from the supreme control of which the Christian is delivered, but not from its entire influence. He shows us our dependence on God's mercy for relief from this debilitated helpless state, and teaches us to seek it in himself. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ, as our prophet, or infallible instructor, strengthens us.

Again, he strengthens us by his example. It is not by precept or by doctrine merely, that he works this necessary change upon us. He has not merely told us what is right. He has shown us how to do it. He has done it himself. He has embodied in his own life what might have been inoperative if set forth only in theory. This is one of the unspeakable advantages arising from our Saviour's incarnation, the community of nature which exists between us. He has set us an example; he has gone before us. When we hesitate, or go astray, or stumble, we not only hear his voice behind us, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, but we see his form before us, sometimes nearer, sometimes further, sometimes more, and sometimes less distinct, according to the keenness of our vision, and the clearness of our spiritual atmosphere. But even when our eyes are dimmest, and our heavens are haziest, if we are believers, we can still see something. Through the mist, and smoke, and dust, and over or between a thousand intervening objects, we can still discern a form, like that of the

Son of man, not merely pointing out the path, but often breaking it, clearing away obstructions, opening unexpected passages, surmounting obstacles, transforming difficulties into helps, levelling mountains, filling up valleys, bridging streams that seemed impassable. Oh, what a blessed work is this in which the Son of God condescends to be employed for our advantage. How can our hopes sink, or our fears prevail, while this forerunner is in sight; and even when he ceases to be visible, because we fall so far behind, or drop upon the earth exhausted, we can still trace his footsteps where we lie, and sometimes track him by the tears and blood with which the path is moistened. At the sight of these, the fainting Christian often breathes afresh, recovers new strength, and starts up to resume his painful journey, willing even to take up his cross in imitation of his Master, who has left us an example that we should follow his steps. Brethren, Christ strengthens us by his example.

But precept and example are not all. We might have these in perfection, and lie motionless. There must be something to excite and prompt, as well as guide. We may hear Christ's precepts, and yet not obey them. We may see his example, and yet not follow it. With both in full view, we may still be impotent to spiritual good, unless some new spring of activity be set at work within us, just as a machine may be complete and well adjusted, yet without effect or use until the moving power is applied. But when it is applied, when all is set in motion, how distinctly do the parts perform their office and harmoniously

contribute to the aggregate result! In one particular, this illustration does not hold good. We are not machines, propelled by an external force, without a conscious co-operation on our own part. We are active and spontaneous in our spiritual exercises; but we have no such exercises until set in motion. If we can imagine a machine composed of living, conscious parts, but perfectly inert, till started by an impulse from without, and then performing its appointed functions with entire precision, we may have an idea of our spiritual state. Or, to drop the questionable figure of machinery, imagine that you see a living man, set down to the performance of a given task, with his materials, his instructions, and his models, all before him, but completely paralyzed, unable to move hand or foot. He is a man; he is a living man; he knows, he understands, the work before him, and he has within his reach whatever is required for the doing of it; yet he neither does nor can perform it. That paralysis as utterly prevents it as if he were dead or absent. But suppose that fatal spell to be dissolved by skill, or chance, or magic, or a sudden divine interposition, and see how instantaneously the mind and body move in concert, how they act and react upon each other, till their joint exertion has accomplished in an hour what before seemed likely to remain undone forever. Such is our condition, even after we are taught, both by precept and example. We are still not strong to any practical effect, until we are constrained to move by some new principle of action. And such a principle is actually set at work in every renewed heart. "The love of Christ constraineth us." If love be

wanting, all is lost; we can do nothing; we are practically just as weak as ever. But let the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts, and all the knowledge and the motives which had long lain as an inert, lifeless mass, begin to move, and in the right direction. All the powers and affections are aroused, and at the same time checked and regulated. What seemed impossible, is now felt to be easy. He who once could do nothing, is now able to "do all things." Brethren, the power of Christ strengthens us, when the love of Christ constrains us.

Again: Christ strengthens us by working faith in us, and by making himself known to us, as the object of that faith. In this life the most favoured have to walk by faith, and not by sight. Christ is to all of us an unseen Saviour. His word and his example are indeed before us. But the reason and the purpose of his requisitions and his dealings with us may be wholly unaccountable. We admit our obligation to obey him, and to follow him through evil and through good report. But when our minds are filled with doubt and wonder as to the reality, or meaning, or intent of his commands, how can we energetically do them? Such a state of mind necessarily produces weakness. We delay, we vacillate, we stop short, we begin afresh, until our strength and patience are expended. And as we cannot hope to see these difficulties all removed at present, we can only become strong by trusting, by confiding, by believing what we do not see, by looking forward to what is not yet revealed. Now "faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."

Faith therefore strengthens. To be strong, we must believe, confide, and trust. The reason of this fact is obvious. If we wait until we see and comprehend the solution of all difficulties, we shall never begin to act, and such inaction is, of course, a state of weakness. If we refuse to take any thing for granted, or to receive any thing on trust, prompt and energetic action is impossible. The emergencies requiring it will pass away before we have put ourselves in motion. The corrective of this weakness is a well-placed trust in something out of ourselves. A blind capricious trust is worse than weakness; but a firm trust in something or some person that deserves it, is a source, a never-failing source of strength.

Now Christ permits us, and invites us, and enables us to trust in him. And what can be a more secure foundation upon which to build? His almighty power, his omniscience, the perfection of his wisdom, truth, and goodness, and the infinite merit of his saving work, all warrant an implicit and unwavering trust. Relying upon him, we may dismiss our doubts and fears, collect our wandering and distracted thoughts, concentrate all our energies on present duties, and do wonders of obedience, encouraged by the testimony and example of "so great a cloud of witnesses," "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, *out of weakness were made strong*, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Out of weakness were made strong—precisely what we want, and faith accomplishes it; faith in

Christ, both as its object and its source; that faith of which he is the "author and the finisher." Christ strengthens us by working in us faith.

Once more: he strengthens us by union with himself. This is the office and effect of faith. We trust an unseen, not an absent Saviour. He is not afar off, but at hand. We should seek the Lord, if haply we might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being. This is not more true of the natural relation we sustain to God, than of the spiritual relation we sustain to Christ. If we are true believers, it is in him we live, and move, and have our spiritual being. He is indeed not far from every one of us. Nor are we merely near him. We are united with him. We are ingrafted on him, we are inserted in him. The nature of the union thus denoted by strong figures is to us inscrutable. We only know that they express a great and glorious reality, of which we can judge by its effects; and its effects are such as these, that the life we now live is no longer ours but Christ's, that the spiritual strength we now exert is, in the same sense, His; that his strength is made perfect in our weakness; so that when we are weak then we are strong; and instead of despairing, we can glory in infirmities. This new, transcendent, real, though mysterious strength, is the fruit of union with the Saviour; and the union which produces this strength is itself produced by faith. In giving faith then, Christ gives union, and in giving union, he gives strength. No wonder that the same soul which desponded when cast upon its own re-

sources, should feel strong as it grows conscious of its union, its identity with Christ. In itself it could do nothing. In him it can do all things. This is the true sense of Paul's language. I can do all things, not merely *through*, but *in* Christ enabling me, not merely by his help, but by spiritual union and incorporation with him, so that he lives in me and I live in him. Brethren, Christ strengthens us by uniting us to himself.

In all these ways, then, by instruction, by example, by his love constraining them, by faith uniting them to himself, the Saviour strengthens true believers, even the weakest, till at last in the assurance of this strength they lose the sense of their own weakness altogether, and can face the most appalling dangers, and the most gigantic difficulties, saying, I can do, not merely this or that, but all things, not merely one thing, or a few things, or many things, but all things, in Christ enabling me.

Let us now consider more particularly what is comprehended in the general expression "all things." We cannot add to its extent of meaning, which is already universal; but we may give additional distinctness to our own conceptions, by observing separately some of the detached particulars summed up in the collective phrase, "all things." And as the very strength of this expression makes complete enumeration impossible, we must be contented to distinguish a few classes, among which the particulars may be distributed. When the Apostle or the humblest Christian, in the triumph of his faith, exclaims, "I can do all things," he means, of course, all that is re-

quired or necessary. He may, therefore, be naturally understood as saying: "I can do all duty." Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil. The Christian is no longer under the law as a way of salvation, but he is under law as a rule of duty. The Saviour freed men from the heavy yoke of legal, ceremonial bondage, but he did not free them wholly from restraint. For he invites them to take *his* yoke upon them, and assures them that his yoke is easy and his burden light. The believer still has duties to perform, and the remainder of corruption often makes them hard indeed. He knows not how to go about them. He shrinks from them. He would gladly evade them, or persuade himself that they are not obligatory, but in vain. As soon as his sophistical reasoning is concluded, he reverts, as if by instinct, to his old conclusion. He admits the obligation. He attempts to discharge it. But a thousand difficulties spring up in his way, until at last, despairing of escape, he manfully resolves to brave them, in reliance on divine grace. And no sooner is this resolution formed, than all his difficulties vanish. He beholds with astonishment the mountain levelled to a plain. He is ready to ascribe the change to outward causes, but he soon finds that the change is in himself. He is conscious of strength, but not his own, and knowing whence it comes, he is ready to cry out, in the presence of the very obstacles and perils which before unmanned him: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

We may safely appeal to the experience of every Christian, for the truth of the assertion, that nothing so effectually overcomes the hinderances to duty, and

supplies the want of strength for its performance, as the teaching of Christ by his word and spirit—the inciting influence of his example—the consciousness of love to him as an impelling motive—the active exercise of faith in him as the foundation of our hope —and, above all, the controlling sense of oneness with him—from the joint operation of which causes, the most fearful and infirm of his true followers, who, abandoned to himself, could do nothing, absolutely nothing, "can do all things," in the way of duty.

Taking "duty" in the widest sense of which the word admits, what has now been said may be considered as including all emergencies. For if the Christian can do all he ought to do, nothing more can be demanded or desired. Thus explained, this is not so much a special case to which the text applies, as an additional description of all cases. But if we take the doing of duty in a more restricted sense, as signifying active compliance with a positive command, there are other cases left to which the doctrine of the text may be applied. For they whom Christ thus strengthens, are not only qualified to do his will in the specific sense just mentioned, *i. e.*, to perform the acts which he requires, as pleasing in his sight, but also to resist the evil influences which assail them from another quarter. The believer is not only called to the performance of duty; he is also tempted to the commission of sin. He is therefore in danger of offending God, both by omission and by positive transgression.

This two-fold danger is enhanced by his own weakness. As he has not spiritual strength to do

what is right, so he has not strength to resist or avoid evil. This arises from the nature of our fallen state. That state is not one of mere indifference or even of repugnance to what God requires, but of inclination and attachment to what God forbids. When left to ourselves, therefore, we cannot remain in equilibrio. The scale of evil instantly predominates. Our native dispositions and affections are not neutral, but enlisted on the wrong side of the controversy. This is the case, even with true converts, just so far as their corruption is permitted to control their conduct. That control is no longer, and can never again become paramount, much less exclusive. But it may continue and extend so far as to make resistance to temptation one of their severest trials—so severe that they are sometimes ready to despair of being able to withstand. And yet, if such be truly the desire of their hearts, their own experience shall effectually teach them that what is impossible with man is possible with God. The same voice that says to them in tones of solemn warning: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," (1 Cor. 10, 12,) shall also say to them in tones of merciful encouragement: (1 Cor. 5. 13.) "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Now what is this way (ἔκβασις) of escape but Christ himself, and how shall our weakness and corruption become able to endure temptation, but through Christ enabling us? Here then is another great emer-

gency to which the text applies; and I put it to yourselves, Christian brethren, whether you have not experienced, in some degree, the efficacy of the means which God has thus provided. Is there no well-remembered juncture in your history—in that of some among you have there not been many—when the conquest of yourselves and the defeat of your spiritual foes seemed as hopeless as the conquest, nay as the creation, of a world; and you were ready, though unwilling, to succumb, in sheer despair of a successful resistance? but precisely at the moment when this self-despair had reached its height, it was transformed, as by a miracle, into a childlike trust in Christ, for which it seemed to be the necessary preparation; and before that new-born strength, the force of your temptations seemed to melt and vanish, so that, as you looked with a serene contempt upon what a little while before appeared invincible, you could say as Paul says, and as every true believer, in his turn is called to say, I can do all things through Christ enabling me. Yes, through him you can do even that which seems most hopeless; you can endure, resist, subdue, despise, all, all temptation!

In the two cases which have now been mentioned, we have seen the Christian actively performing and resisting through the power of Christ enabling him. But there is still a third case which must not be overlooked; a case in which the Christian is not active but passive. He is not called merely to performance and resistance, but to patient endurance. This is in some respects more trying than either of the others. Not merely because it involves the painful sense of suffer-

ing, but because it contains nothing to excite and stimulate, and foster pride. To obey and to resist are active duties which require an energetic exercise of will. But to endure, to suffer, to lie still, to be incapable of action or resistance—this is to many a severer test—it is to all hard, hard indeed. When this part of God's providential discipline begins to be applied to individual believers, they are sometimes ready to repine and quarrel at its being used at all in their case. They cannot see the need of remedies so painful, when a milder treatment, as they think, would answer every needful purpose. At length, perhaps, they are convinced of their error, and made willing, by painful but wholesome experience, to believe that the evidence of God's paternal favour towards them would have been less clear and perfect if they had not been thus visited. Their minds are satisfied, at least as to this *kind* of spiritual discipline being adapted to their course. But still they may be ready to find fault with the degree, with the extent, to which the process is continued. They are ready to say, It is good that I have been afflicted, but they cannot restrain themselves from adding: "How often and how long, O Lord? forever?" Yet even this hard lesson many have been made to learn, and learn it so effectually, that they may be said to have become accustomed even to the long continuance or frequent repetition of some providential strokes, as peculiarly adapted to their case, and perhaps essential to their spiritual safety.

But this familiarity with certain forms of suffering may destroy or at least impair its medicinal effect,

and when the Great Physician suddenly changes his accustomed mode of treatment, and applies some untried, unexpected remedy, the first smart of the new process often forces, even from the hearts of true believers, the expostulating question, Why this new infliction? I had learned to bear the other; I had almost ceased to feel it; but this new stroke opens all my wounds afresh, and reproduces my almost forgotten agonies. In thus saying, or thus thinking, how unconsciously may those who suffer answer their own arguments, and vindicate the very course of which they venture to complain. They little think, at least in the first moment of surprise, that this new form of the divine dispensations may have been adopted for the very reason that the old one had become endurable, and therefore ineffectual. But even this consideration, when suggested and received, is not enough to give the necessary power of endurance. That is still afforded only by the presence of Christ, and the believer's union with him. It is only when that union has been consciously effected and has borne its necessary fruit, that the afflicted soul can say with full assurance of its sorest trials, however frequent, various, or protracted, as it said before of duty and resistance to temptation, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

If this view of the strength derived by Christians from their union with the Saviour enabling them to act, resist, and suffer, even in the most extreme emergencies, could be presented clearly to the mind, the belief of those who are still strangers to him, it is almost inconceivable that they should fail to experience

a kind of envious dissatisfaction. Even some of you, my hearers, may be ready to exclaim, All things are possible to the believer, but to me belief itself is the greatest of all impossibilities. If I repent and believe, I can do all things, but I cannot comply with the condition, and I cannot therefore lay hold of the promise. Yes, yes, you can. If you are truly willing, you are able; for the same grace that enables, must dispose. If you are willing, you are able, not in your own strength, but enabled by the same Christ who enables the believer to do all the rest. The first step that he takes in his journey heavenward, he takes leaning on the same arm that supports him to the end. This is one of the mysteries of the gospel, hard to explain but glorious to believe, that a gracious God bestows what he requires, and gives us even that without which he gives nothing. If you would really be saved, that desire is as much his work as the salvation which it seeks, and he who wrought it in you will not suffer it to remain unsatisfied. Look up then, sinking and desponding soul, and put not from you the last hope, and, it may be, the last opportunity of safety. Repent, believe! These are among the "all things" which, through Christ enabling, even you may do, and having done them, you shall then be able to do all things else, until at last looking back upon difficulties conquered, nay, impossibilities achieved, and forward to the course yet to be run, in time or in eternity, your farewell shout of victory shall still be the same as the first faint, feeble cry of your new-born hope, "I can, I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me."

XI.

PSALM 51, 7.—Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

THERE is no surer index of men's real dispositions and desires than their prayers; not their forms of prayer, whether written or unwritten, whether prescribed by others or imposed upon themselves, but their real prayers, the genuine expression of their own desires, extorted from them by the urgent sense of want, or danger, or distress; such prayers as are sometimes offered by men who do not habitually pray at all; nay, such as even the blaspheming atheist has been heard to pray in his agony of terror, when a storm at sea, or a dangerous illness has not only convinced him that there is a God, but forced him to his footstool as a suppliant for mercy. Such prayers are prayed perhaps by all men at some time of their lives, and may therefore be appealed to, as exemplifying what is meant by saying, that the surest index to men's real dispositions and desires is that furnished by their prayers.

These may also be described as affording the most certain test of men's disagreement or agreement with

each other, as to that which constitutes the theme or burden of the prayer. Whoever can appropriate the prayers of others, as the genuine expression of his own desires, must desire the same things. However they may differ as to other matters, here they must agree, or else their union in prayer is hypocritical. This is true of all prayer, whether heard in public, or overheard in secret, or read in books. So far as that which is thus read or heard is found to express the religious feelings or desires of him who reads or hears it, so far must those feelings and desires be coincident with those of the man by whom the prayer was offered. In this way we may judge of the agreement of our own experience with that of others, not merely of our own contemporaries, but of those long since departed. When we read the biographies of pious men, and find there the petitions in which they expressed the fulness of their hearts, if ours respond to them, if we can say amen to them, if we can use them to express our own desires, then we may safely conclude that we are sharers, so far, in the same experience which they have left on record.

But delightful as this feeling of communion with the pious dead may be, it is attended with a certain danger, that of sharing in their weaknesses and errors, as well as in their pure desires and heavenly aspirations. This hazard must exist in every case except where inspiration sets its seal, not only on the truth of the record, but on the genuineness of the exercises there recorded. It was not the special inspiration of the "holy men of old" that produced their faith and repentance; if it were, we could not hope to be par-

takers of the same, unless inspired as they were. But their inspiration does assure us, in the first place, that their faith and repentance are correctly stated, and in the next place, that they were genuine; so that if we wish to bring our own to the test or comparison with theirs, we may do so without fear of risk or error. For this very purpose the Bible contains many such expressions of the faith and repentance, the hope and love, exercised by ancient saints, to serve not only as examples but as formulas, in which to clothe our own desires and emotions, and so far as we can do so with sincerity, we have a right to claim a share in their experience. This is one main design of the book of Psalms, and to this use it has always been applied by true believers, not in public worship and instruction merely, but in their most intimate communings with themselves and God. And if there is any one psalm which above all others has been found appropriate to this end, it is surely that from which the text is taken, and in which the broken-hearted penitent of every age has found expressions suited to convey his otherwise unutterable groanings. If ever there was genuine conviction, and repentance, and reliance upon free grace, it was in the case of David, which affords us therefore a most interesting opportunity of bringing our own feelings to the test or standard which has been described. And as the psalm abounds in varied yet harmonious exhibitions of the same essential truth, let us fix our attention on the one prayer recorded in the text, and consider how far we are able and prepared to appropriate it as the expression of our own desires. To this end it will be necessary to inquire

how much is involved or presupposed in the petition. And this may prove to be far more than appears at first sight.

For, in the first place, no one can sincerely offer this petition unless conscious of pollution and defilement. This is necessarily implied in the very terms of the petition. He who says Cleanse me, says by implication, I am filthy. But this is a confession from which pride revolts. Not even all who are in a certain sense convinced of sin are willing to acknowledge this, or even able so to do without hypocrisy. A man may be conscious of sin as a negation, as want of conformity to a standard which he recognizes as the true one, or even as a positive violation of a rule which he admits to be obligatory; not only intrinsically right, but binding on himself; and yet he may recoil from the acknowledgment of sin as a pollution of defilement; something which makes him an object of loathing and abhorrence to all holy beings, and even to himself so far as he is really enlightened in the knowledge of God's nature and his own. Yet this profound and painful self-contempt is an essential part of true repentance, because it is a necessary consequence of just views as to sin and holiness. And even if not necessary to salvation, it would be necessary to an earnest and sincere appropriation of these words of David as the expression of our own desires. For even common sense may teach us, that unless a man is conscious of defilement and uncleanness, he cannot with sincerity ask God to cleanse him.

But there is still another thing implied in this re-

quest, or rather expressed by it; consent and willingness, nay an importunate desire to be purified. This is by no means identical with what has been already said, nor even necessarily included in it. The sense of pollution is perfectly distinguishable from the wish to be delivered from it. True, when the sense of pollution is a product of divine grace, it is always accompanied or followed in experience by the desire of purification. Nor has any one a right to plead or to profess his consciousness of defilement, unless corroborated by such a desire. But for that very reason, it is highly important to look at this desire as a distinct prerequisite or element of true repentance. And another reason for so doing is, that in the experience of the unregenerate a painful sense of degradation and defilement may and often does coexist with a prevailing wish to continue in it. Why? because the man loves the very thing which he acknowledges and really feels to be debasing. What his better judgment, and his conscience partially enlightened tell him is disgraceful, his vitiated appetite, his perverted affections, cleave to and delight in. The drunkard and the libertine, and other classes of notorious sinners, have frequently an overwhelming sense of their own baseness, a distressing consciousness that they have sunk themselves below the level of their kind, and almost to the level of the brutes that perish. And this not only in their lucid intervals of abstinence and partial reformation, but often in the very paroxysm of indulgence, the unhappy victim of his own corruption feels himself to be an object of abhorrence and contempt to all around him, and in proportion to

the light which he enjoys and the restraints which he has broken through, may even be said to despise himself.

But this consciousness of degradation, however real and however strong, is never sufficient of itself to overcome the evil dispositions which occasion it. It is not enough for man to know that sin degrades him, if he still so loves it as to be willing to submit to degradation for the sake of its indulgence. Nor will a mere sense of pollution ever drive a man to God for cleansing, if his affections are so utterly depraved, that his polluted state is one of pleasure and enjoyment to him, not for its own sake, not considered as defilement, but as an indispensable condition of those sinful joys which constitute his happiness. He does not deliberately choose to be polluted and debased, for this is inconsistent with the consciousness of degradation which we are supposing to exist. But he does choose to endure the degradation which he cannot hide even from himself, for the sake of the enjoyments which degrade him. Now with this unbroken love to evil, no sense of pollution can enable him to offer the petition of the text; for he who says with sincerity, Cleanse me, says not only, I am filthy, but I consent, I desire to be cleansed.

But suppose this desire to be felt. Suppose the sinner to be not only conscious of defilement but desirous of purification. And suppose, at the same time, that he considers himself perfectly able to produce it or secure it by an act of his own will, or by a series of such acts, or by the use of means invented by himself. Will such a man, can such a man seek purifica-

tion at the hands of another? Is it not a dictate of reason and experience, that what men can do for themselves they will not solicit others to do for them? True, there are exceptions, but only such exceptions as confirm the rule. Some are so indolent, or proud, or helpless, that they gladly devolve upon others what they should do for themselves: but the public voice condemns their sloth, and in so doing bears witness to the general fact, that what men are conscious of ability to do themselves, they do not invite others to do for them. The same thing equally holds good in spiritual matters. No man comes to God for cleansing who believes that he can cleanse himself. It matters not how deep his sense of degradation and corruption; no, nor how desirous to be purified he seems, if he believes that he can do the necessary work himself, he will not, cannot, join in this petition. He may try a thousand other methods; he may mortify his appetites and macerate his flesh; he may go on a pilgrimage and cross the seas; he may give all his goods to feed the poor; he may give the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul; he may give his very body to be burned; but so long as he believes in his capacity, by these or any other means, to cleanse himself, he cannot pray the prayer of David in the text; for he who with sincerity says "Cleanse me," says by that very act, "I cannot cleanse myself."

But here, as elsewhere, Satan has an opposite extreme for men to rush to. The extreme of impious presumption often leads directly to that of unbelieving despondency. From the absurd belief that man can do every thing, they leap to the absurd belief that

God can do nothing. Once convinced that he cannot cleanse himself, the sinner is in danger of concluding that purification is impossible. And in this desperate belief, some go on in their sins, not that grace may abound, but because grace is believed to be forever unattainable. Now if there is any thing which may be reckoned a certain dictate of reason and experience, it is that men will never seriously ask that to be done which they believe to be impossible, or ask another to do that of which they know him to be utterly incapable. How can a man then ask God to cleanse him, if he despairs of being cleansed, as something utterly impossible. Or what will it avail that he believes himself polluted, and is willing to be purified, and knows himself to be incapable of doing it, if at the same time he believes it to be equally beyond the power of the Almighty? No, whoever earnestly and sincerely says to his Maker, "Cleanse me," says implicitly as the leper in the gospel said expressly, "If thou wilt thou canst."

Nay, this belief in God's ability to do what we demand of him, is not merely implied but expressed in the petition of the text: "Purge me with hyssop, and *I shall be clean;* wash me, and *I shall be* whiter than snow." This is equivalent to saying, "if thou purge me, I shall certainly be clean; if thou wash me, I shall certainly be whiter than snow." But the words thus added have another meaning, or rather another application, which is not to be neglected. They are also equivalent to saying, "Purge me with hyssop, *that I may be* clean; wash me, *that I may be* whiter than snow." Thus understood, they give the reason

why, the end for which, the royal penitent desires to be cleansed. But, cleanse me that I may be cleansed, would be a mere tautology, unless we give the latter words a pregnant and emphatic meaning—"that I may be cleansed"—*i. e.* that I may be entirely, thoroughly, completely cleansed. And that this is really the meaning, is apparent from the words expressly added in the other clause—"wash me, that I may be whiter than snow." Snow, wherever it is known, is the natural and customary standard of this quality. "As white as snow," suggests to every mind the idea of unsullied whiteness, without any tinge or shade of darker colour. "Whiter than snow," is a hyperbole, denoting, in a still stronger manner, absolute or perfect whiteness, perhaps with an allusion to the purity here spoken of as something supernatural, both in its origin and its degree. If the most spotless and unsullied whiteness known to nature is the whiteness of snow, the expression "whiter than snow" is well adapted to suggest the idea of a whiteness, to which nature furnishes no parallel, and of which she can furnish no example. This, when applied to moral and spiritual qualities, must signify a perfect purity and entire freedom from moral taint and even imperfection. And the prayer, "wash me, that I may be whiter than snow," expresses a willingness, or rather a desire, not only to be cleansed, but to be fully and entirely cleansed. And nothing less than this desire can be sufficient on the part of one who claims to be a sharer in the faith and penitence of David, and in proof of that participation echoes his petition, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be

clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Whoever makes this prayer his own, is to be understood as saying, "I desire to be cleansed from all pollution."

This may, at first sight, seem to be the same thing that was stated as the second particular. But near as the two things are in theory, in practice and experience they differ widely. A man may be willing to be cleansed, and yet not anxious to be cleansed completely; he may consent to be "white," yet not aspire to be "whiter than snow." In other words, he may be satisfied with partial or external renovation. He may wish to see some stains washed out and others left untouched; or he may earnestly desire to have the outward surface cleansed from its pollution, while the inner part is full of all uncleanness. He may not even be aware of the extent, the depth, of his corruption. He may be disposed to look upon it as a superficial or cutaneous affection, and to wish for the removal of its unsightly and disgusting symptoms in which it manifests itself, not aware that these are but the outward symptoms of a deep-seated malady within; and that, unless this be reached by remedies, the disappearance of the symptoms could be only temporary, and might aggravate the malady itself. It is not until the minds of men are thoroughly awakened and enlightened in relation to the turpitude of sin, and of their own sin, as it is in itself and as it is in them, and filled with a desire to be saved from it as well as from the punishment which it incurs; it is not till then that they are fully able to adopt the prayer of David, as a prayer, not for partial but com-

plete purification ; and to understand that he who says "cleanse me," asks, not only to be white, but also to be "whiter than snow."

To this desire of perfect purity, however, even the heathen may attain, and some of their philosophers have actually made it the great theme of their moral speculations. But their efforts have been no less vain than those of many Christian errorists, to solve the mighty problem of human restoration by every means but that of God's appointment. Even those who profess to rely, and do rely, on God as the sole efficient cause of this momentous revolution, may expect to see it brought about by moral suasion, or by mere instruction, or by good example, or by ceremonial forms, or by meritorious abstinence or penance, or by mere connection with the Church, or mere enjoyment of its privileges, or by mere intellectual reception of the truth, or by any other means distinct from Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice, or independent of it.

And yet this is the very way, the only way, in which the sinful soul of man can possibly be cleansed from the guilt or the pollution of its sins, the only way in which it can either be justified or sanctified. And therefore this must enter into men's desires of renovation as a necessary element, or they can never pray the prayer of David in its true sense and its genuine spirit ; no, nor even in the plain sense of its actual expressions. For he does not simply say, "Purge me," but specifically, "purge me with hyssop," an expression borrowed from the purifying ceremonies of the law, by which the fact of human depravity, and the necessity of moral renovation were

continually kept before the minds of the people, in connection with the doctrine of atonement by the sacrifice of life for life. This connection was intimated and enforced, not only by the constant combination of these purifying rites with those of sacrifice, but also by the actual affusion or aspersion of pure water, as the natural and universal symbol of purification in general, and of the sacrificial blood as the symbol of purification from the guilt and stain of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ in particular. Among the substances combined with the water and the blood in these symbolical purifications was the plant called hyssop, which was also used as a mechanical instrument of sprinkling, and was thus connected in a twofold manner with the purifying rites of the Mosaic ritual, so that its very name would call up, in the mind of every Hebrew reader, the idea of purification by atoning blood, and in the mind of those especially enlightened, the idea of that promised Saviour, by whose blood alone this moral renovation could be rendered even possible.

To all then that has been already mentioned as essential to an intelligent and full participation in this prayer of David, and in the penitence and faith of which it is the genuine expression, we must now add that all is unavailing, because either spurious or defective, without a hearty willingness, not only to be cleansed, and to be cleansed by God, but to be cleansed in God's own way; not only to be "purged," but to be "purged with hyssop," "not by water only, but by water and by blood," and through him who "came both by water and by blood, even Jesus

Christ;" for the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth from all sin.

If then, my hearer, you are still unconscious of your guilt and danger as a sinner before God; or if you are convinced of sin only as a failure to come up to the standard of God's law, or at most as a positive transgression of that law, but not as a pollution and a degradation, loathsome in itself, and making you an object of abhorrence to all sinless intelligences; or if you are in some degree aware of your debasement, but yet willing to continue in it for the sake of the enjoyments which it now affords you; or if, though willing and desirous to be cleansed from this pollution, you are trusting in your own strength to effect it; or because you cannot do it, are unwilling to believe that even the Almighty can; or if you are willing and desirous to be only cleansed in part, and shrink from the idea of complete purgation as too humbling or too self-denying; or if you are even willing to submit to this revolutionizing process, but unwilling to resort to Jesus Christ as your purifier, and to his blood as the only purifying element; on any of these suppositions, and alas how many individual cases do they comprehend, whatever else you may do with effect, whatever else you may say with sincerity, I tell you there is one thing which you cannot so do or so say, you cannot join sincerely in this prayer of David—"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." To yourself such a prayer is but an empty and unprofitable form; while to God whom you invoke, it is a mockery and insult.

But if, through God's grace, your experience is the

opposite of all this, if you do indeed feel yourself to be a sinner; if you feel your sin not only as a burden and a debt, but as a stain and a pollution; if you are willing to forego the pleasures of sin for the purpose of escaping from this deadly degradation; if you are thoroughly convinced that you cannot cleanse yourself, and yet that God can cleanse you; if you can heartily consent to be cleansed by him, not superficially or partially, but thoroughly and perfectly—not in the way of your own choosing or of man's devising, but of God's providing—then my prayer is, that God may deal with you this moment as he dealt of old with Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba, when he "opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water;" but in this case, not by water only, but by water and by blood, for ye are come, perhaps without suspecting it, "to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, a blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel." "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. For (out of Christ) our God is a consuming fire."

XII.

Luke 13, 3. (and 5.)—Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

These are among the most familiar words of Scripture, and among those most frequently employed to rouse the consciences of the impenitent. They are so full of meaning, that even the most commonplace and superficial exposition of the sentence must convey enough to fill the mind and agitate the heart of one who has been really awakened. There is, however, a peculiar point and pregnancy of import in the words, which may be wholly overlooked in making them a simple basis for the general affirmation that *All sinners must repent or perish*. This, true and awful as it is, is rather presupposed than positively stated. To confine ourselves to this, as the whole meaning, is to lose sight of two emphatic words in the short sentence; "ye" and "likewise." Assuming, as a truth already known, that all men must repent or perish, the text affirms that they whom it addresses must repent, or perish likewise, *i. e.*, like those particularly mentioned in the context. Another feature of the passage which is apt to be neglected is, that it not only teaches the necessity of repentance to

salvation, but presents a specific motive for its exercise, or rather teaches us to seek occasions of repentance in a quarter where most of us are naturally least disposed to seek them; nay, where most of us are naturally and habitually prone to find excuses for indulging sentiments as far removed from those of penitence as possible; uncharitable rigour and censorious pride.

The only way to get a full view of this deep and varied import, is by looking at the text in its connection, which may serve at the same time, as a single but remarkable example, to illustrate the importance of deriving our instructions from the Scripture in its integrity and continuity, and not from certain salient points, which frequent handling has made sharp and bright, but at the same time often put into a false position with respect to that by which they are connected, and without which they cannot be duly appreciated or even correctly understood.

During our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem, of which this part of Luke contains a full and deeply interesting narrative, his mind seems to have been filled with sad forebodings of the fearful doom impending over Israel. After warning his disciples and exhorting them to watchfulness, by various striking parables and figurative illustrations, he turned, on one occasion, to the multitude who were present, and, addressing them as representatives of the nation at large, upbraided their stupidity and insensibility, in so sagaciously anticipating changes of the weather by indications gathered from experience, while even the most solemn premonitions of approaching moral changes

and catastrophes escaped their notice. "When ye see a cloud rise out of the west," *i. e.*, from the Mediterranean Sea, "straightway ye say, there cometh a shower," or rather a storm of rain, "and so it is," for these were not mere random guesses or fanciful prognostications, but the fruit of long-continued and repeated observation. "And when ye see the south wind blow," from the direction of the great Arabian wilderness, "ye say, there will be heat, and it cometh to pass." The same observant and sagacious faculties, applied to things of infinitely greater moment, might have convinced them that there were storms and heats at hand, of which they were at present wholly unsuspicious. This absorption in mere outward interests and changes, to the neglect of inward spiritual things, is the hypocrisy with which our Saviour here reproaches them. "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern the signs of this time?" the prognostics of momentous revolution, with which that most eventful period of history was crowded.

Without reckoning any thing purely preternatural which we find recorded by contemporary writers, that solemn interval, extending from the advent to the downfall of Jerusalem, was full of strange occurrences, all showing that Jehovah had, according to his prophecy, begun to shake the nations. Yet of these exciting and alarming symptoms, the contemporaries of our Saviour took so little note, that it was only by explicit, or at least by solemn warning that he could bring these fearful futurities before their minds. No wonder that, impatient of this strange judicial blind-

ness, he exclaimed, "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right." Will you apprehend no evil, unless I predict it in so many words? This he would not do, but he apprised them indirectly of their danger, by comparing their condition to that of one against whom his neighbour has a righteous quarrel, and who is just about to be arraigned before the judgment seat, without any prospect but of condemnation, and whose only hope is therefore in a speedy compromise and reconciliation, in default of which the law must have its course, until the last farthing of the debt is paid.

This illustration, drawn from an incident of real life, which comes home, with peculiar force, to the business and bosoms of the mass of men in every civilized community, appears to have produced at least so much effect upon the feelings of some hearers as to turn their thoughts towards strange and startling casualties, as tokens of divine displeasure, not without a secret wish to understand and represent them as denoting that displeasure, towards the few and not the many, towards their neighbours, not themselves. With some such feeling, certain persons present in the multitude related to our Saviour a revolting incident, of which they had probably just heard, a massacre of Galileans by the cowardly but sanguinary Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, at the very altar, so that their blood might be said to have been "mingled with their sacrifices." That God should have abandoned them to heathen cruelty in that most sacred of asylums where, if anywhere, they might have hoped for his protection, did indeed look like a terrible ju-

dicial visitation, and it may naturally be supposed that they who told and they who heard it, while they shuddered at the sacrilegious murder, were disposed to say within themselves, "Yet surely they must have been atrocious sinners, to be given up to such a fate!"

Among the hearers there was one, however, who felt no sympathy with this self-righteous and uncharitable judgment; whose mind was free from all confusion, and his feelings from all bias; who saw at once the truth of the whole case, and its secret effect upon the minds of those around him; and who hastened, with his usual benevolent severity, to check the fermentation of insidious error, and to turn the thoughts of those who had embraced it in upon themselves. Instead of chiming in with what appeared to be a pious recognition of God's justice in the punishment of sinners, our Saviour tears with a relentless hand the mask from the secret workings of his hearers' hearts, and forces them at once upon their own reluctant sight by what seems to be a simple and unstudied answer, but in whose simplicity there was a sting for many a hitherto invulnerable conscience. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered these things?" It was no doubt to his Galilean hearers that he especially addressed himself. It was no doubt from them that this report of Pilate's conduct to their countrymen proceeded. Hence the peculiar force of our Lord's answer to his own searching question: "I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Not contented with this startling contradiction of their secret thoughts, he cites another case himself, also perhaps of recent date, and vastly stronger in appearance as a ground for the opinion which he meant to demolish, because one in which the hand of God himself was visible directly, without any intervention of a wicked human instrument, or any consequent confusion of this agent's sin with God's most righteous retributions; a case in which a number of lives had been lost by a sudden providential casualty: "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men dwelling in Jerusalem?" Having put the first unanswerable question to his Galilean hearers, he puts this to the Jerusalemites, still more self-righteous, and still more apt, it may be, to imagine, that in this case, if in any, God had drawn a broad line of distinction between them and these atrocious sinners, whom he not only suffered to perish, but destroyed, as it were, with his own hand. Yes, they might have said, if they had spoken their whole heart, we do think that they were more guilty than the rest of us, and we think so on the authority of God himself, who has spared us, even in the act of destroying them. But whether uttered or suppressed, this interpretation of God's judgments meets the same indignant contradiction as before, and the same unexpected introversion of the sentence upon those who had pronounced it: "I tell you nay, but except ye repent,"—yes, you, of Jerusalem, no less than these despised Galileans, "except *ye* repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

There is something so paradoxical in this repeated

contradiction of what seems to be a plausible and pious sentiment, that a correct apprehension of the latent error, and of the truth which our Saviour, with such emphasis, opposes to it, may serve not only to vindicate the truth of this authoritative declaration, and its perfect consistency with all God's attributes and all his acts, so far as either can be known by us, but also to correct the same insidious error, if it should make its way into our own minds, or should now be lying hid there under some specious pretext of hostility to sin, and zeal for God's vindicatory justice.

1. That suffering is a penal consequence of sin, seems to be a dictate of reason and conscience, no less than of revelation. At all events, it is a doctrine of religion which, above most others, seems to command the prompt assent of the human understanding. They who acknowledge the existence of a God at all, have probably no impressions of his power or his justice stronger than those which are associated with his providential strokes, and more especially with death as the universal penalty. War, pestilence, and famine, are regarded by the common sense of men, not merely as misfortunes but as punishments, and nothing more effectually rouses in the multitude the recollection of their sins than the report or the approach of these providential scourges. In all this, the popular judgment is according to the truth. The miseries which we witness or experience are but so many memorials

> "Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world and all our woe."

In the recognition and assertion of this great truth, there is no fear of excess. The fact is one which cannot be exaggerated, and ought not to be extenuated, much less dissembled or denied. Sin is the ultimate and universal source of sorrow, and all God's providential visitations are unequivocal signs of his displeasure against sin.

2. What is thus true in the aggregate must needs be true in detail. If all the suffering in the world proceeds from sin, then every Divine judgment in particular must flow from the same source. Not only in reference to the sum total of man's sufferings, but in reference to every pang, it may be said, with truth and certainty, that sin has been at work, that this is the natural and necessary consequence of sin, and that not of sin as an abstraction, nor of sin as the common undivided heritage of Adam's offspring, but of sin as the property and character of individual responsible agents. In other words, wherever we see suffering, we see a proof, not only that there is sin somewhere, to account for and to justify that suffering, but that the individual sufferer is a sinner. The only exception to this general statement, which the world has ever seen, in reality confirms it. Christ was beyond comparison the greatest sufferer of our race; yet Christ was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." But his sufferings were vicarious; he bore *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows; he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities. This, which is one of the great fundamental doctrines of the Bible, while it shows, on the one hand, the indissoluble connection between

sin and suffering, shows, on the other, how the greatest sufferer could be free from sin, although in every case but this, the least sufferer must be a sinner. We need feel no hesitation, therefore, in asserting either of these two propositions: 1, that all suffering is the fruit of sin; and, 2, that every sufferer is a sinner.

3. And yet it cannot be denied, that there is something in this doctrine thus presented, against which even the better feelings of our nature are disposed to revolt. This is especially the case when we contemplate instances of aggravated suffering endured by those who are comparatively innocent, and still more when the sufferings of such are immediately occasioned by the wickedness of others. Can it be that the dying agonies of one who falls a victim to the murderous revenge or the reckless cupidity of others, are to be regarded as the punishment of sin? Against this representation all our human sympathies and charities appear to cry aloud, and so intense is the reaction in some minds, that they will not even listen to the explanation, which may nevertheless be given, and which I will endeavour to give now.

4. This feeling of repugnance to the doctrine now in question, though it springs from a native sense of justice, is mistaken in its application, because founded upon two misapprehensions. In the first place, it assumes that the sufferings, in the case supposed, are said to be the penal fruits of sin committed against man, and more especially against the authors of the sufferings endured. Hence we are all accustomed to enhance the guilt of murder, in some cases, by contrasting the virtues of the victim with the crimes of

the destroyer. And in such a state of mind, not one of us, perhaps, would be prepared to hear with patience, that the murder was a righteous recompense of sin. But why? Because at such a moment, we can look no further than the proximate immediate agent, and to think of him as having any claim or right of punishment is certainly preposterous. But when the excitement is allayed, and we have lost sight of the worthless and justly abhorred instrument, we may perhaps be able to perceive that in the presence of an infinitely holy God, the most innocent victim of man's cruelty is in himself deserving only of displeasure, or at least that no difficulties hang about that supposition except such as belong to the whole subject of sin and punishment.

5. If any does remain, it probably has reference to the seeming disproportion of the punishment to that of others, or to any particular offence with which the sufferer seems chargeable in comparison with others. Here again the feeling is not only natural, but in its principle a just one, yet entirely misdirected under the influence of a second error with respect to the doctrine of the Bible on the subject. The misconception lies in the confounding of the general propositions, which have been already stated and affirmed; 1, that all suffering is the penal consequence of sin, and 2, that every individual sufferer is a sinner, with the very different proposition, that every providential stroke is a specific punishment of some specific sin, or that the measure of men's sufferings here is in exact proportion to their guilt, so that they upon whom extraordinary judgments seem to fall are there-

by proved to be extraordinary sinners. These doctrines are not only quite distinct from those before propounded; they do not even follow from them as logical deductions. They may be consistently, and actually are repudiated and abjured by those who steadfastly maintain, that all suffering is from sin, and that all sufferers are sinners. The same mistake is palpable enough, and therefore easily avoided, when confined to matters of the present life, or questions of mere temporal morality. If men would be as rational and candid in their judgments of spiritual matters, as they often are in those pertaining to this world, there would be less disposition to reject important doctrines of religion on account of their abuse or the unauthorised additions made to them.

6. The effect of this last error is the more pernicious, and the cure of it more difficult, because the doctrine which it falsely imputes to Christianity is really maintained by many Christians, as well as by many who make no such professions. There has in all ages been a disposition to regard remarkable calamities as providential judgments on particular offences, and a morbid curiosity in tracing the connection between such crimes and such punishments. The existence of such a disposition in the human heart, and the plausibility with which it can defend itself by a confident appeal to undisputed facts, and to undisputed principles of morals, have never been more forcibly and fully set forth, or more pointedly and solemnly rebuked than in the book of Job, one grand design of which, to say the least, is to expose this error and refute it. That it still existed in the minds

of those to whom our Lord addressed the language of the text is obvious enough, and its continued existence at the present day is, alas, no less so. It may not now be pushed to the extreme reached by some of Christ's disciples, when they "asked him, saying, Lord, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" But it exists and operates, and often unexpectedly betrays itself in a censorious attempt to trace the sufferings of others back to certain causes, often more offensive in the sight of human censors and inquisitors than in that of a heart-searching God. But even where the sin charged is indeed a sin, its existence is hastily inferred from the supposed judgment, without any other evidence whatever. This uncharitable tendency can be cured only by the correction of the error which produces it.

7. But in attempting this correction, there is need of extreme caution, as in all other cases, where an error has arisen, not from sheer invention or denial of the truth, but from exaggeration, or perversion, or abuse of truth itself. And the more certain and important the truth thus mistaken or abused, the more imperative the need of caution, lest, while we gather up the tares, we root up also the wheat with them. In the case before us this necessity has not been always practically recognized by those who have undertaken to vindicate the ways of God to man, but who, in consequence of this neglect, have verified the proverb, that the remedy is sometimes worse than the disease. They, for example, who would guard against the error now in question by denying a particular providence, are not only chargeable with wilfully

receding from the ground of Christianity to that of heathenism, nay from the higher ground of Plato to the lower ground of Epicurus, but with making Christ himself guilty of the grossest inconsistency, forgetful that the same authoritative voice which twice said, in the case before us, "I tell you nay," had expressly taught in the foregoing context, that without God's knowledge and his leave, not a hair falls, or a lily withers, or a sparrow dies. This is one of those cases in which the simplest and apparently most childlike teachings of religion coincide with the ultimate attainments of philosophy, since no reasoning or speculation on this subject has availed to get beyond the grand yet elementary conclusion, that if there is a providence at all it must be universal, and that no distinction can be drawn between the great and small as objects of God's notice and his care, without infringing on the absolute perfection of his nature by restricting his omniscience, or at least by applying to it terms and conditions which have no propriety or truth except in reference to our own finite nature and the necessary limitations of our knowledge.

8. Another false and dangerous corrective of the error now in question—still more insidious because it approximates more nearly to the truth—is that which, admitting a particular providence and a general connection between sin and suffering, denies any penal or judicial connection between particular providential strokes and the sins of the individual sufferer. This doctrine, when fairly stated, is opposed, not only to the word of God, but to experience and the common sense of mankind. To deny that the bloated

countenance, the trembling limbs, the decaying mind, the wasted fortune, and the blasted fame of the drunkard or the libertine, are penally consequences of sin, of his own sin, of his own besetting, reigning, darling sin, would be ridiculous, and all men would regard it in that light. And the same thing is true of some extraordinary providences. When a bold blasphemer, in the act of imprecating vengeance on his own head, falls down dead before us, it would argue an extreme of philosophical caution or of skeptical reserve, to hesitate to say, as the magicians said to Pharaoh, when they found themselves confronted with effects beyond the capacity of any human or created power —"This is the finger of God." It was conceivable indeed that even this might be a magical illusion, near akin though far superior to their own, and yet the evidence appears to have convinced them. So in the case supposed, it is conceivable and possible, that even such surprising correspondences may have some other cause than that which forces itself on the mind of every spectator; but it does so force itself, and does amount, in the vast majority of cases, to a conclusive proof of a direct judicial act of God's vindicatory justice on a flagrant and notorious sin.

Now any one such case would be sufficient to refute the doctrine that men's sufferings have nothing to do with their personal sins, in the way of penal retribution. What then, it may be asked, is the error, theoretical or practical, which Christ condemns, and against which we are warned to be forever on our guard? If it be true, not only that suffering in general is the fruit of sin, and that every individual suf-

ferer is a sinner, but that particular sufferings may be recognized as penal retributions of particular sins, where is the harm in tracing the connection, for our edification, or for that of others? The answer to this question is a prompt and simple one, and may be stated under three particulars:

The first is, that even if the general rule be granted, the exceptions are so many and notorious as to render it inapplicable as a standard or criterion of character. A rule which, if applied with rigid uniformity, would directly gainsay the Divine decision in the case of Job's three friends, and brand, as the chief of sinners, the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, and a countless host of less conspicuous but no less patient sufferers, unknown perhaps to man, but precious in the sight of God, must needs be a precarious and uncertain test. The second answer is, that this is a matter which God has not subjected to our scrutiny. Although, in certain cases, both of common experience and extraordinary judgment, he has lifted the veil from the judicial import of his dispensations, as a timely warning to presumptuous sinners, it is still true, as a general fact, that this mysterious connection between causes and effects, is not among the things which may lawfully and usefully excite our curiosity, but rather among those of which the Scripture says, "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God." The final cause of this reserve may perhaps be found in the third reason to be stated for abstaining from such inquisitions, to wit, that their tendency, as shown by all experience, is not so much to edify

as to subvert; not so much to wean from sin, as to harden in self-righteousness, by letting this censorship of other men's sins and other men's punishment, divert our thoughts entirely from those which *we* commit, or those which *we* are to experience.

This brings us to the lesson taught directly in the text and context, as to the only safe and effectual corrective of the error which we have been considering. For even after men have been convinced that this censorious inquisition into the sin and punishment of others is not only unavailing but pernicious, they may still be drawn to it by natural dispositions which they cannot resist or overcome. To counteract this wayward tendency, our Saviour here employs the only efficacious method. Without diverting the attention of his hearers from the great humiliating truth, that suffering is the fruit and penal consequence of sin, he shows them, with consummate wisdom, that it admits an application much more certain and more salutary than the one which they were accustomed or disposed to make of it. Their favourite inference from the doctrine was, that those who suffered more were greater sinners than themselves. The one which our Lord teaches them to draw, is, that if some members of the human family were thus overtaken in their sins and visited with condign punishment, the same perdition must await the rest, however long deferred by the divine forbearance. Instead of valuing themselves, because they had escaped thus far, they ought rather to assure themselves that they should not escape forever. The judgments which they saw descend on others, did not prove them to be greater

sinners than themselves; they only proved that the guilt, of which they were themselves partakers, was entitled and exposed to the divine wrath, and that the course of wisdom, therefore, was to flee from the wrath to come, instead of fancying themselves to be beyond its reach or able to resist it.

This is only one out of a multitude of instances, in which our Saviour's divine wisdom is evinced by the facility and power with which he converts a curious, or even an insidious question, into an engine of conviction. On this very same occasion, when a person in the multitude requested him to act as an umpire between him and his brother, in a matter of inheritance, our Lord took occasion, from the untimely and irrelevant request, to unmask and reprove the covetousness latent under what might seem to be a lawful and commendable assertion of one's legal rights. A little afterwards, when Peter asked him whether his injunctions of watchfulness were meant for all believers or for those who held official station—perhaps not without some complacent reference to his own position—instead of a direct reply, our Lord describes, in clear though figurative terms, the character of a faithful office-bearer in his church, leaving the application to the consciences of those who heard him. So in the case more immediately before us, instead of expressing indignation or astonishment at Pilate's cruelty, and far from conniving at the secret inferences drawn by those around him from this atrocious act, and the casualty mentioned with it—to the disadvantage of the victims as compared with themselves—he teaches them to look at home—to tremble

for themselves—to cease from all invidious speculation on the magnitude of other men's offences—as determined by the weight of their misfortunes or the manner of their death—and look towards the similar perdition which, in one form or another, sooner or later, awaited all involved in the same general condemnation.

Another characteristic of our Saviour's teaching, here exemplified, is, that even in his most severe denunciations, he is far from shutting up the door of mercy. By the very act of holding up repentance, or a thorough change of mind, and character, and life, as an essential, indispensable condition of escape from the destruction which he threatens, he reveals the glorious and blessed truth, that such escape is possible. The promise, "repent, and ye shall live," is wrapped up in the threatening, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Here then is the use which this instructive passage teaches us to make of the calamities of others, whether those which fall on individuals in private life, or those which strike whole classes and communities. The whole secret may be told in one short word, Repent. As the goodness of God to ourselves ought to lead us to repentance, so ought his judgments upon others to produce the same effect. Every such judgment should remind us that our own escape is but a respite—that if they who perish in our sight were guilty, we are guilty too, and that unless we repent we must all likewise perish.

This means something more than *perish also;* it means *perish in like manner;* if not with the same

external tokens of perdition, with a ruin no less real, no less fearful, no less final. As addressed by Christ to the contemporary Jews, the words had a terrible significance, which they were not prepared to comprehend or to appreciate, but which received a fearful illustration from subsequent events. In less than half a century from the date of this solemn admonition, the atrocities of Pilate and the casualty of Siloam were to be repeated on a scale of horrid and terrific grandeur. The blood of thousands, in the frenzied desperation of intestine strife, was mingled with their sacrifices, not by Roman swords, but by their own; and, as the eighteen had been crushed by the fall of a single tower, so an untold multitude were to lie entombed beneath the prostrate walls of their polluted temple.

In reference to these points of resemblance, the two incidents referred to in the context, might be said to typify or symbolize the national catastrophe which was then approaching; and, in reference to the points, Christ might say to those who heard him, as representatives of Israel, if not as individuals, "Except ye repent, ye shall all *likewise* perish"—as if he had said, Except ye repent, your blood shall be mingled with your sacrifices, too; you, too, shall be crushed beneath the towers of your temple; even in reference to the mode of your destruction, "ye shall all *likewise* perish!"

But, even leaving out of view these outward coincidences, striking as they are, the words are full of solemn warning and instruction, not only to the old Jews, but to us, upon whom these ends of the world are come.

They give a tongue and an articulate utterance to every signal providence, to every sudden death, to every open grave, to every darkened house, to every scattered fortune, to every blighted reputation, to every broken heart, in society around us. They command us, they entreat us to withdraw our view from the calamities of others, as proofs of *their* iniquity, and to view them rather as memorials of our own, of that common guilt to which these manifold distresses owe their origin, and in which we, alas, are so profoundly and so ruinously implicated. Oh, my hearers, can you not hear all this, as it were, articulately uttered by the Providence of God? If you can, then the Lord Jesus Christ is saying, just as really and solemnly to you as he said to those around him eighteen centuries ago, Think ye that this or that man, overtaken in his sins, and swept away by some terrific judgment, was a sinner above all that dwell in New York or America? "I tell you nay; I tell you nay." You are yourself, perhaps, a greater sinner; you are certainly so great a sinner that, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," if not in the same way to the eyes of man, yet as really, as terribly, as hopelessly, as endlessly. Why should we think of measuring gradations in perdition, or of comforting ourselves that we are not so bad as others, if we perish after all? Oh, my friends, to perish is to perish, whether as the chief of sinners, or as something less. The circumstantial differences in the fate of those who perish will be lost in its essential identity. And even the momentary consolation of this difference may be denied us. When you hear of

war, of famine, and of pestilence, as wasting other lands or other portions of our town, you may, perhaps, congratulate yourself that these desolating scourges are far distant; or, if any of them be approaching, that they only sweep away the refuse of society, and move beyond the precincts of the magic circle where you are yourself intrenched. Alas! so thought the people of Jerusalem and Galilee, who told our Saviour of the massacre of Pilate and the downfall of the tower in Siloam. You, like them, may be mistaken—like them, and like their fathers, in the days of Isaiah, to whom he said, "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us, for we have made this our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it," &c., &c. If that consumption is again let loose upon the earth, and if it has a voice, methinks I hear it saying even now to us, Suppose ye that they who

died in Ireland of famine, and in Mexico of battles, and in Asia, Europe, and America of cholera, were sinners above all who dwell in the four quarters of the earth? I tell you nay; I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!

XIII.

Isaiah 53, 3.—He is despised and rejected of men.

There is scarcely any thing more characteristic of the masses of mankind, than the facility with which they can be roused and set in motion, by any specious promise to improve their temporal condition. Even where their actual state is not one of extraordinary suffering, nor that which is offered in its place peculiarly attractive, nor the means by which it is proposed to accomplish it remarkably appropriate or efficacious, some natural propensity to change still operates in favour of the new proposal, and vast multitudes are instantly pervaded, as it were, by a galvanic influence, entirely disproportionate to the visible inducements, and apparently independent of all rational considerations.

There *are* individuals, and even classes of society, which seem to remain proof against this popular susceptibility, and take no part in the exciting movements which it generates. But, on the other hand, there are cases, still more numerous and marked, in which this same susceptibility is carried to a length which verges on insanity; and this extreme may fairly neutralize or cancel that already mentioned, so as to

leave the general statement still emphatically true, that this mobility and readiness to catch at new schemes for improving the condition of society, does really belong to the masses of mankind, as a prominent feature of their common character. I speak of the masses, not in any invidious or unfavourable sense, as opposed to the select few who are thought, by themselves or others, to monopolize refinement and intelligence; but in the proper sense of the expression, as denoting great numbers, and even whole communities, in opposition to smaller bodies, and still more to insulated individuals. For, one of the most striking points connected with the general fact in question, is the uniformity with which it may be verified, upon the largest scale of observation and comparison. Not only may the same cause be seen to operate in a vast aggregate of individual cases, but the actual and visible effects which it produces, are of a social, not to say a national, description. That is to say, the movements prompted by this potent and mysterious spring in man's constitution, are not merely personal, or limited to small organic bodies, but the movements of societies, communities, or nations, by a common impulse, as if suddenly endowed with a rational and moral individuality.

This is abundantly verified by history, which exhibits, when surveyed upon a large scale, nothing more distinctly marked, or more impressive to the eye of the intelligent observer, than those great migrations, the unsettling and removal of whole races, which have so often changed the whole condition of society, and given complexion to all after times. The profane

traditions of the old world are unanimous, amidst their variations as to all things else, in showing us the surface of primeval history, however stagnant and monotonous in general, as repeatedly broken and enlivened by these earth slides and avalanches of migration—the abrupt, and, for the most part, unaccountable removal of the vast living masses from their original or immemorial homes to new ones.

The earliest history of Greece is nothing but a complicated maze of such migrations; and the same thing may be said, in due proportion, of the infantile reminiscences of every other ancient people. Even the New World forms no exception to this general statement. According to the Mexican traditions, the old race which established the empire overthrown by Cortez, had been wandering eight centuries before it settled on that lofty table-land. With all allowance for traditional corruption and exaggeration, there is, no doubt, truth in these accounts, for several reasons, and especially because they substantially agree with sacred history, which sets before us, at a very early period, the imposing sight of a great human current, setting from the source of population, in the central valley of South-western Asia, and represents even God's peculiar people, as passing through a series of remarkable migrations.

To show the confirmation of the same thing, in the history of later times, I need only allude to the repeated inundations of the Roman empire by immense and overwhelming floods of foreign population from some unknown reservoir or fountain, following each other like successive floods of lava, from repeated eruptions of

Vesuvius or Etna, sweeping away existing institutions, and almost obliterating every ancient landmark; so that Europe, as it now is, or as it lately was, derives the most marked peculiarities of its condition, from the presence and the power of these so-called Barbarians.

For these great movements of the human race, historians have been puzzled to account. No one hypothesis affords an adequate solution. That the shifting masses have been started by the want of room, or of subsistence, or by a definite desire of better settlements, may serve to explain some cases, but admit not of a general application, since, in many instances, the current of migration has set out from spacious regions, rich but thinly settled, to lands already overstocked, if not exhausted, so that one large population must be destroyed, or at least displaced, to make way for another; while in many cases there appears to have been no desire of settlement at all, but the masses, once set in motion, have continued to move on, until lost in the surrounding nations or destroyed by collision with bodies harder than themselves.

This difficulty in explaining the phenomenon on any ordinary principles of action, only makes it more adapted to the end for which I cite it, as an illustration of the restlessness and feverish mobility which is characteristic of the masses of mankind. That it has not been destroyed by the spread of civilization or of free institutions, we may satisfy ourselves by simply looking round us—watching the movements—counting the pulsations of the great body politic, of which we form a part. Look at the symptoms of suscepti-

bility in reference to the three great worldly interests of health, wealth, and freedom. Observe the easy faith, the persuasible docility of men in general with respect to sovereign remedies for some or all diseases. See how the popular credulity keeps pace with the very extravagance of the pretensions, so that men seem, by some strange inversion of the ordinary laws of reasoning, to believe and be convinced in inverse proportion to the evidence afforded.

Look again at the avidity with which new fields of speculation, or new mines of wealth are seized upon without a disposition to contest the most improbable assertions, or rather with a perverse disposition to lay hold of what is most improbable in preference to what is less so, and to make a mind of merit of believing it, and proving the sincerity of the belief by corresponding action, not unfrequently involving painful sacrifice of actual possession or of cheering prospect for what may be a chimera, for what must be an unsatisfying portion. All this is exemplified among ourselves.

For a third example, we must look abroad at those tumultuous excitements in the sea of nations, from which we, through the divine mercy, dwell apart, as having already realized the vision of which others dream. Without detracting in the least from the value of the object aimed at, the secure enjoyment of civil and religious freedom, it is impossible to look at these commotions from our post of observation without seeing how the rational and right desire of liberty is diluted on the one hand, or poisoned on the other, with childish folly, with insane illusion, with corrupt

ambition, and, above all, with an utterly irrational credulity, a blind and superstitious faith in the sufficiency of theories and systems to heal wounds which have been bleeding and discharging nearly six thousand years, and an impious reliance upon men, and not the best men, to effect what God has solemnly reserved as an inalienable, incommunicable part of his divine prerogative.

From all this it is easy to infer that we do no injustice to ourselves or others, when we represent it as a characteristic feature of man's actual condition, that he is predisposed to look with favour upon any specious project of amelioration that his bias, in relation to such schemes, is rather to credulity than scepticism, and that this propensity is not a matter of prudential calculation, but proved to be as much an affection of the heart as of the head, by the avidity with which the inclinations constantly outrun the judgment, and in some cases wholly supersede its action.

It would, however, be at variance with man's nature as a rational being, if his reason were completely set at naught, or even held in abeyance, by his sense of want, and his impatience to supply it. While the restless character in question does undoubtedly arise from an instinctive consciousness of something needed to appease the cravings of unsatisfied desire, and a vague belief in the reality of something more desirable than any thing as yet attained, it seems impossible that man, without a forfeiture of that which raises him above the brutes, should systematically act in opposition to the dictates of his reason and his better judgment, or perversely choose what

he cannot but see to be least entitled to his choice. Passion, and appetite, and strong delusion may obscure his perceptions and impede the action of his rational powers, but cannot utterly destroy them. And accordingly we find that, in relation to these very schemes and hopes of temporal advancement, there is a vast expenditure of cunning and sagacity in order to secure the advantage and to baffle competition. It might therefore be expected from analogy, that the influence exerted upon men by offers to ameliorate their actual condition would bear some proportion to the greatness of the evils which they actually suffer, to the fitness and efficacy of the means employed to bring about a change, and to the value of the positive advantages bestowed or promised.

Seeing how credulous men are, how ready to believe and act on the authority of questionable evidence, and under the control of interested guides, provided there is any possibility of bettering their condition after all, it might be supposed that this facility of faith and action, this promptness to believe, and this eagerness to act on the belief, would rise with the clearness of the evidence afforded, and the authority by which the movement has been sanctioned or required. And, as the strongest case conceivable, it might have been expected, with the highst antecedent probability, that if the prospect, opened to mankind or any portion of the race, was that of complete deliverance from the worst of evils by the use of means infallibly effective, and if they were summoned and encouraged to the use of these by an authority alike

incapable of error and deception: I say, in such a case as I have just supposed, it might well have been inferred from all analogy, that the restless disposition of our race to better its condition, and the readiness with which it is convinced that such amelioration is attainable, would operate at once, without restraint, and with complete unqualified effect in the production of the change proposed.

With this antecedent probability let us now compare the fact as attested by the most authentic evidence. The key to history, both sacred and profane, is furnished by the fact that, after man had fallen through the influence of evil spirits, and God had determined to restore him by the gift of his own Son and Spirit, he foretold to our first parents, or rather in their presence to the great seducer, that there was to be a protracted contest between two antagonistic races, called in the prophecy the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman; a warfare full of fluctuations and reverses, but ultimately tending to the triumph of the cause of truth, and righteousness, and mercy.

This prospective division of mankind into two great parties gives complexion to all history, and may be traced distinctly from the date of the prediction to the end of time. The first visible triumph of the good cause was reserved for the appearance of its champion upon earth, when it was symbolized and really begun by victories openly achieved over the adverse powers of darkness. To prepare for his appearance, the explicit revelation of God's will was limited for ages to a single race, and every thing in their condition was so ordered as to excite, in the highest possible degree,

the sense of want and the correlative desire of something to supply it.

As the time for the fulfilment of the promise drew near, this restless expectation reached its height. From the Jews it passed over to the Gentiles, where it seems to have combined with a collateral tradition, reaching back to the first periods of human history, and both together generating in the palmiest days of Roman domination, a pervading apprehension of some great event or personage as near at hand: a state of feeling attested both by Jewish and classical historians. This general condition of the public mind throughout the Roman empire, at the very acme of its greatness, and the widest sweep of its victorious yet pacific sway, was nothing more than an extraordinary and simultaneous exhibition of those same uneasy movements of the mind and will which we have seen to be exemplified, in more irregular and insulated forms, throughout all nations and in every period of history. It was the innate consciousness of want, and the irrepressible desire of something better and yet unpossessed, subjected to new stimulants, and brought, by providential means, to bear upon the great scheme of human renovation and advancement which was about to be unrolled by the hand of God himself.

This scheme possessed in the highest degree every thing which we have seen to be required as passports to men's confidence. The evil which it undertook to cure was the greatest in itself, and the cause of every other; the means such as only the Divine compassion could have brought to bear upon the end proposed; and this end, far from being merely negative, or lim-

ited to freedom from existing evils, comprehended the experience and possession of the highest good conceivable, both natural and moral. Here then was a case in which that native impulse might have been expected to have full scope and activity.

If left to conjecture, or to reason from analogy, how natural and easy to imagine the effect of this stupendous revelation on the hearts and lives of the expectant nations. As all eyes had, by some mysterious influence, been turned towards the spot where the deliverer of mankind was to appear, and the great men and wise men of the world, no less than the vast mixed multitude around them, held their breath, half in hope and half in dread of the event, it might have been imagined that when He, the incarnate Son of God, and yet the man of sorrows for our sake, rose on the view of this vast amphitheatre of nations, not as a gladiator in the arena of Vespasian's matchless structure, for the amusement of the world, but for its ransom, for its rescue from the greatest of all evils, and indeed from all the evils that had stained or crushed it since the first sin was committed—the wonder, gratitude, and joy of the spectators would have found vent, not in noisy acclamations, not in silent and inactive tears, but in a mighty simultaneous rush of nations towards the cross, and the gushing life-spring which flowed from it—a unanimous, enthusiastic self-appropriation of this heaven-descended panacea for all pains, this inexhaustible supply of all necessities, this talisman of entrance to eternal glory, comprehending in itself all the true, and superseding all the false expedients for attaining the same end, by

which these very nations had again and again been roused to frenzy, and excited as one man to energetic but insane exertion. Yes, it might have been imagined that the men who had been thus roused by the false, or partial and inadequate devices of philosophy, philanthropy, or practical experience of plotting craft or soaring ambition, would have fallen down in speechless adoration at the feet of Him, invested with divine authority and power to do what men and angels had essayed in vain.

With this imagination, natural and reasonable as it would have been beforehand, let us now compare the simple, unexaggerated fact as recorded in the text by the prophetical historian, of a suffering Messiah. "He was despised and rejected of men." This is no hyperbole or oriental figure of speech, it is the literal history of Christ's reception by the nations; the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He was despised and rejected. He for whom they had been waiting with an eager curiosity, when he came was despised and rejected by the very people who had hung with idiotic faith upon the lips of augurs, pythonesses, magi, and false prophets. Even by the Jews themselves, who had existed as a nation to prepare for his appearance, he was despised and rejected, *i. e.* by the masses of the people; while among the Gentiles, with the exception of the chosen few who joined with the elect Jews to compose the Christian church, the exciting anticipation of his coming was exchanged for bitter spite, or frivolous contempt, or stupid indifference, and they who were too wise and too refined to believe the record God had given of his

Son, went back to their oracles, and fanes, and mysteries, to the filthy rites of Venus and the bloody rites of Moloch "as the dog returns to his own vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

These expressions may be strong, but the reality is stronger, and the utmost license in the use of language would fall short of the loathsome folly and ingratitude of this reception given to God's highest, best, and most invaluable gift. Nor was it a mere temporary fit of madness, an ephemeral delirium. It has lasted ever since without so much as a lucid interval in the case of the great masses of mankind. And never has this scornful rejection of an offered Saviour been more odious in its spite, or more pitiable in its senselessness, than at the times, and in the places, and among the men, where the natural credulity, of which I have been speaking, and the practical docility which is its fruit, were most conspicuously manifest.

These darkened glimpses of a distant past may prepare our eyes for the intenser and less grateful light of times and places nearer to ourselves. Why should we talk of the old Romans and the Jews, of the Crusaders and the medieval generations, when we have only to look out of our windows to behold precisely the same spectacle, the same susceptibility of strong impressions, the same lively hopes and fears, the same credulity or easy faith, disposing to believe the most extravagant inventions, if embellished with a promise of long life, or boundless wealth, or unstinted freedom; the same restless inquiry after some new bait

to this insatiable appetite; the same precipitation in obeying any call to fresh indulgence, without stopping to compute the chances or to count the cost; the same compassionate Redeemer knocking at the door of men's hearts, as a man of sorrows, bruised for their iniquities, entreating, as it were, for leave to save them, and the same contemptuous repulse.* As this was, in prophecy, a constituted token of the true Messiah, so has it been in history, and still is, the invariable character of Christ's reception by the world, by the nations, by the masses of mankind. The offence of the cross has not ceased. "He is despised and rejected of men."

This would be bad enough and strange enough, even if it were in perfect keeping with the character and conduct of mankind in general. Even if men were naturally unsusceptible of strong excitement in relation to the future, even if it were hard to rouse their hopes and fears, or to render them available as means of practical control; if they were not easily imposed upon by falsehood or exaggeration, or disposed to act without sufficient evidence or warrant, it would still be an unspeakable infatuation to refuse to believe or act on God's authority. They might be inaccessible to dreams of wealth, and independence, and longevity, and yet be chargeable with madness in rejecting everlasting life. But how shall we find words for the description of this madness when the ordinary conduct of mankind is all the other way; when they are credulous, and tractable, and eagerly precipitate in every thing that promises to better their condition in the present life, and only sceptical, and self-willed, and

refractory, when it is God who calls, and Christ who pleads, and everlasting life or death that is at stake! This astonishing exception to the general rule of human character and conduct seems to call for explanation, and the Bible gives it. The secret of this startling inconsistency lies in the simple but humiliating fact, that men are most insensible precisely to the greatest evils and the greatest good. This is a part of their hereditary curse. "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead," to be forever undeceived. One decisive symptom of this madness is, that it regards eternity as less than time, the soul as inferior to the body, God as less entitled to belief than man, an hour of animal indulgence more attractive than all heaven, a year of bodily privation or endurance more terrific than the gnawings of a guilty conscience, and the fire of divine wrath in the hottest hell forever. I am speaking now of those who do not pretend to doubt the truth of Christianity or to dispute the authority of God, but who nevertheless act in direct opposition to their own avowed convictions. With such delusions, why attempt to reason? "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."

This view of the delusion, under which the whole race naturally labours, casts a melancholy light upon the actual condition of the world, and more especially on those great national convulsions which are continually reaching even these ends of the earth with the prolonged reverberation of their noise, and the sympathetic shock of their concussions. However highly we may estimate the prize for which the nations are

contending, how should we be affected by the thought that after all, these struggling masses are unconscious of their greatest dangers, and unsuspicious of their deepest degradation. To us the fearful events that are now passing, seen by a dim light at so vast a distance, are like some great nocturnal conflagration, or some scene of shipwreck; and to one who takes the view which I have just presented, most of the actors in this fearful drama must appear like men enveloped in the flames, or sinking in the waves within reach of the only means of possible escape, yet unaware of it, or in their blindness and confusion disregarding it; catching, with desperate eagerness, at this or that expedient, only to relinquish it anon or to perish in reliance on it, when a single step, a motion of the hands, a turning of the body, nay a look or a word of admonition from another, might ensure their safety.

He who could gaze on such a scene in real life without a sickening of the heart, must be without one altogether. And a kindred feeling may be naturally stirred by the sublime but awful spectacle of burning empires and of shipwrecked nations. As in the case supposed, however distant or however feeble, the humane spectator would experience an involuntary impulse to do something, to hasten towards the scene of death, to shout or cry aloud in warning; so the man who looks upon contemporary changes in the light of truth and of eternity, may feel an irrepressible yearning to extend a helping hand, or raise a helping voice to those great masses now in violent commotion, and too soon perhaps to be baptized in blood, to warn them that there is a worse oppression than the

one beneath which they are chafing, and a nobler freedom than the one in which they are rejoicing, to divert their eyes and their idolatrous affections from the objects of their overweening trust—the men whom they worship as their national deliverers—to One who is a Saviour indeed, a deliverer both of men and nations, but whom, in common with their enemies and tyrants, they are still rejecting.

To a mind susceptible of such impressions, and capable of large and lofty views of human interests, as well as open to the calls of suffering humanity, the question may perhaps present itself as one of individual duty. What can *I* do? what shall *I* do for the remedy of this great evil? I will answer the question, if it comes from one who is himself a voluntary subject of Christ's kingdom. I say, follow your leader into the thickest of the fight, into the hottest of the fire, into the heart of the deep sea if need be; do what you can to let his name be heard and his victorious banner seen on every bloody field, on every wreck-strewed sea or shore. But if, alas, you are yourself an alien from the very Christ whom you would preach to others, then my answer is, remember that the ocean is made up of drops, and all societies of rational, responsible, personal agents. If every man among the masses now in motion on the surface of society, like conflicting icebergs in the arctic sea, were personally loyal and devoted to the Saviour, the entire mass could not despise or reject him. If the greater portion were thus faithful, the controlling influence in nations and communities must be a good one. Let us not then be so far absorbed in the condition

of the mass as to lose sight of its constituent elements.

For a moment at least, insulate yourself from the surrounding mass in which you are, perhaps, too much disposed to lose sight of your individuality, and let me put a parting question, to be answered, not to me, not to any fellow-man, but to your conscience and your God. "He was despised and rejected of men." Of these men you are one by nature; are you still one in the heat of your affections and the conduct of your life? Are you still one of those by whom the offer of salvation is rejected? Do you still refuse or delay to trust him, and to give yourself away to him? Ah, then! I beseech you, think no longer of the nations or the masses who reject him. Waste not your pity on mankind in general, but reserve it for that one deluded heart, which in the midst of all this light and all this mercy, still despises and rejects the Saviour. While you thus bar the door of your own heart against him, shed not the tear of sentimental sorrow over his exclusion from the hearts of others, lest he turn and—pointing to that untried future which is still before you—say to you as he said to the women who lamented him, when on his way from Gabbatha to Golgotha, from the judgment seat of Pilate to the place of crucifixion, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children."

XIV.

Hebrews 11, 10.—He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

These words refer to the Patriarch Abraham, one of the most extraordinary characters of any age. Without going into his biography at large, let me call your attention to two circumstances, which especially distinguished this great man from others. In the first place, he was the Friend of God. I mean not merely that his history entitles him to this honourable appellation; not merely that God treated him and looked upon him as his friend; but that he is expressly called the Friend of God in Scripture. By the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said to Israel: "Thou art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend."

And why was he thus honoured? Was not Abraham a child of wrath even as others? Yes. He could not therefore be entitled meritoriously to the distinction which this name implies. No, he himself well knew that it was not for any merit of his own, that he was allowed to be the Friend of God. On the contrary, it was by renouncing all dependence on himself that he acquired this honour. Faith was his grand

distinction; simple reliance on the word of God; belief in his promises, and acquiescence in his method of salvation. It was thus that Abraham became the friend of God. But was not this a meritorious faith? Did not this very self-renunciation and reliance upon God entitle Abraham to claim his favour? It would have done so, but for this simple reason, that his faith was the gift of God, and that the same glorious Being who rewarded him, bestowed upon him that which was rewarded. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? The law of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. It was faith, my brethren, faith that rendered Abraham pre-eminently great, so great as to be called the Friend of God, and the Father of the Faithful.

This is the second honourable title which I propose to mention. Abraham, the Friend of God, was also the Father of the Faithful. Not, as the Jews supposed, the Father of their nation merely. This mistaken notion made them cry out in reply to our Lord's severe reproofs, "We have Abraham to our father." And what was his answer? "God is able even of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." That is to say, though all Israel should fail, Abraham might still have a numerous spiritual seed; and God can give him such even from the most unexpected quarters, the most unpromising materials. While the unbelieving natural descendants of Abraham are cast out, the degraded heathen can be put into their place by the power and grace of God. He is able, even of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham. It was not of Jews then, but of true believers, that Abra-

ham was the spiritual Father; the Father of the Faithful.

He was their father, first, as being their exemplar. He is held up as a model of strong faith to all believers, and they who follow the example of his faith, are in that respect his children. In this sense he is the Father of the Faithful. But he is also the Father of the Faithful, because the promise made to him embraced all believers who came after him. The condition of this promise was not obedience to the law, but faith in the gratuitous mercy of God, and in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. And this was the condition, not to Abraham only, but to his spiritual seed, *i. e.*, to all who should believe as he believed. "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." As one of the contracting parties in this gracious covenant, or rather as the representative of those to whom these promises were given, Abraham was the Father of the Faithful.

Passing over all his other claims to high distinction your memory will readily suggest, I desire you to fix your eyes on these two titles of nobility bestowed upon Abraham in the word of God, and measuring his rank by these, to take into consideration a remarkable fact in his history to which I now invite your attention. This fact is, that Abraham, the Friend of God and the Father of the Faithful, was a homeless man, a wanderer, who sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents like an Arab or a Tartar. This fact, though not inexplicable, is so far singular as to deserve our particular attention

Why, then, was Abraham a wanderer, a homeless man, a sojourner in the land of promise? I remark (1) that it was not on account of poverty. In the East, indeed, the wandering mode of life is not in any case a sign of poverty. Powerful chieftains and whole tribes of warriors lead such a life from choice, or because it is necessary for the subsistence of their flocks and herds. But even if it were in general a criterion of poverty, it could not be so in this case. Abraham was rich—rich by inheritance—rich by acquisition—rich by the blessing of God on the increase of his possessions—and rich through the favour of the kings and chiefs whose friendship he enjoyed. His history is that of one who lived in ease and affluence, practising the characteristic hospitality of an eastern chief.

2. Was it then because he had no real estate, no landed property, to which he could lay claim, and on which he might reside? The whole land of Canaan was in one sense his own. It was his by express grant from Jehovah—made sure to him and to his heirs forever. It is true that when he needed a possession of a burial-place he bought it with his money of the children of Heth. But this was a part of that same course of self-denial and forbearance which is now in question. The same motive that made him a sojourner and wanderer, led him to forego his rights as the legitimate owner of the soil, and the question still arises what these motives were.

3. We read that when Abraham first crossed the Jordan from the east, "the Canaanite was in the land." The Hivite, the Hittite, the Jebusite, the

Amorite, and other sons of Canaan, had possession of the country. And so thickly were they settled, in the central part at least, that there was not room for Abraham and Lot to live together. May it not be, therefore, that these actual possessors of the country would not suffer him to dwell among them? Had they known his pretensions, or, to speak more properly, his rights, they might have hated him and driven him away. But as he made no efforts to enforce those rights, nor even to assert them; and as he came among them from the east with flocks and herds, and as an independent chieftain, they received him with respect, and this respect increased.

It is, indeed, an interesting feature in the history of Abraham's expatriation, that in Egypt, in Philistia, and in Canaan, he was treated by the natives, not only as a man respectable for wealth and power, but as a Prince, a "Prince of God," and as a Prophet, one who held immediate intercourse with God, and was an interpreter of the divine will. In these characters he was known and reverenced by the heathen who surrounded him; and except in the case of the attack on Sodom and Gomorrah by the "confederated kings," all his relations with the Canaanites were amicable. And in the only case where he applied for land, it was granted by the Hittites in a manner most courteous and cordial. It was not, therefore, on account of any enmity between him and the Canaanites, that, instead of founding or accepting a great city, he preferred to live a wandering and what we would call a homeless life. There must be other reasons for his course.

4. Since then it was neither poverty, nor the want of land, nor opposition on the part of its possessors, that deterred him from inhabiting a city, or, at least, from leading a more settled life, it may be suggested, that his perseverance in a wandering course, shows him to have been a mere barbarian, one who was unable to appreciate the comforts of a settled life, or rather, who had never had experience of them. Thus we find that in Arabia there are tribes of Bedouins who regard their wandering life as the most honourable possible, and laugh to scorn those pleasures and advantages of civilized society about which they know nothing by experience. But let it be observed that these tribes inhabit the Arabian desert, where cultivation exists only in detached spots, and where the herdsman is obliged to change his pasture-ground and home continually.

Abraham, on the other hand, was in a fertile, cultivated, thickly settled country, full of proud cities, walled towns of inferior size, and villages innumerable. There is strong reason to believe that the Canaanites who were then in the land, had reached a pretty high degree of civilization. Scanty as our information is about them, there are incidental indications of improvement which are not to be mistaken. But even supposing that they were barbarians, it does not follow that Abraham was also one. Coming as he did from that part of the globe which seems to have been first settled after the flood—from a country, which in later times, claimed, and was allowed to be, the cradle of knowledge by the heathen world, it is not to be supposed that he was a barbarian. The

mere possession of the true religion, would have had, in this as well as other cases, a refining influence. No, he was no barbarian. It was not because he knew no better that he chose to sojourn as a stranger in the land of promise—to dwell in tents instead of houses—and to govern an encampment, not a city or a kingdom.

5. Was it then because he thought it wrong to lead a settled life in towns and cities, that he dwelt in tents? There is no trace of such a doctrine in the word of God, and Abraham was too well grounded in the divine will, to hold it as a superstition. He was no ascetic. His mode of life, as I have said already, was a generous one, without fanatical antipathies—without the practice of monastic austerities or the will-worship of self-inflicted mortifications. It was not because he looked upon a settled life and civilization as sinful, that he was willing to relinquish them. What then was his motive?

6. To some the thought may here occur, that we are searching for the explanation of a fact which needs none. Why should Abraham's wandering be considered stranger than the wandering of any other eastern Chief? And as those of the highest rank lead such a life to this day, it need not be regarded as below the dignity even of the Father of the Faithful and the Friend of God. He came into the country with his flocks and herds; and as the land was densely peopled, he was under the necessity of frequently changing his encampment and his pasture. This would be wholly satisfactory, but for the Apostle's mention of the patriarch's unsettled life, as a re-

markable evidence of faith. If it arose merely from the nature of his property, and in fact contributed to his convenience and increase in wealth, it would hardly have been said of him, that "by faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of him of the same promise." We are, therefore, forced to the conclusion that his motive for pursuing such a course, was very different from that which leads the ordinary herdsmen of the east to shift from place to place, and to live and die beneath a roof of camel's hair or goatskins.

7. Having thus determined negatively, that it was neither poverty, nor want of title to the land, nor opposition on the part of the inhabitants, nor ignorance, nor mere ascetic self-denial, nor a regard to temporal convenience that induced him to reside in tents, rather than in a palace and a city worthy of so great a prince, we are ready to receive the explanation of the text, which is this, "he looked" or was looking "for a city." There is an ambiguity in the English version which is not in the original. "To look for," in modern English, means to search for or to seek. In the English of our Bible, where the phrase is not uncommon, it means simply to expect. The sense then, is not that Abraham was wandering in search of a city upon earth, but that he lived in quiet expectation of a city. "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." It was this "patience of hope" that rendered Abraham indifferent to the walled cities of the Canaanites around him, whose antiquity was of ancient days, and whose

defence was the munition of rocks. Nothing so effectually breeds indifference to present objects, as the hope of better things to come. The traveller pressing homewards after a long absence, can pass, with a contemptuous smile, or absolute unconsciousness, those very objects which the homeless traveller dwells upon with rapture. As the venerable patriarch journeyed from Dan to Beersheba, passing among the cities and domains of the Canaanites, we may imagine that we saw him looking ever and anon beyond these objects to one more remote, and losing sight of Kirjath-Arba and Jebus, since called Hebron and Jerusalem, with their tall towers and heaven-scaling walls, amidst the loftier battlements and turrets of that real yet ideal city, towards which he was journeying. "He looked for a city."

8. And what sort of a city did he look for, in contempt of those around him? How did the city of his expectations differ from the cities of the Canaanites and the Philistines, from old Damascus, and from Ur of the Chaldees? It had foundations. "He looked for a city which hath foundations." And had not they foundations? In one sense, they had none. They were liable to change. In the same sense, Abraham's city, which he looked for, had foundations, has them now; for observe the present form of the expression. It was a city, therefore, not of this world; for in this world there are no foundations time-proof. And whence had the city of his hopes these firm foundations? From the Architect.

9. Whose builder and maker is God? God does not build like man. The foundations of his structures

are laid deep in his decrees, and the cement has been growing hard from all eternity. His power over the materials he uses, is not merely the disposing power of a builder, but the absolute power of a maker. What he builds he creates. The city of which he is the maker and builder, is eternal: it has foundations which decay can never weaken, and which laugh at the violence of storm and earthquake. Abraham lived in expectation of a city which was not of this world. It was what we call heaven, in the highest sense, the residence prepared by God for his true followers after death—a faithful city in which dwelleth righteousness, the new Jerusalem which John beheld in vision. It is a city which has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

And who are its inhabitants? "The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it." And are none to be excluded? Ah, yes! "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." And no names are found there but the names of those who wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is the grand distinction of the city for which Abraham looked. It is a city free from sin. In this it differs from all earthly cities. It is hard to conceive of one

of our great cities without the associated images of filth, riot, drunkenness, debauchery, and wretchedness. But if we ever reach the city of Abraham, and rest upon his bosom at its sumptuous feasts, we shall know how to separate these hateful concomitants from our conceptions of a city.

And why is it called a city? Because with a city we associate ideas of substantial strength, immense wealth, regular government, social intercourse, refinement of manners, and external splendour. But what are all these, in the cities of the earth, to the surpassing glories of that city for which Abraham looked, and where the saints shall be enthroned as kings and priests unto God? No wonder, then, that Abraham, forgetting things around him, looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

10. Here, then, we begin to see a marked resemblance between his case and our own. However foreign and remote from our experience, what has hitherto been said of his condition, at last we are alike, we are all sojourners and strangers upon earth, we seek the same city as the Patriarch. However well we may be pleased with it, however fully satisfied with what it can afford, we know that our abode in it is only for a time: it is not the place of our rest. And of this we are receiving constant admonitions. If man's relations to his fellow-man remained unaltered during the present life, he might be tempted to believe that this was his final resting-place. But Providence has left no room for such an illusion. The cords that bind us to the world are breaking one after another, and the very ground on which we stand seems

to slide away from under us; so that, in middle life and old age, we appear to tread no longer the green and smiling earth we trod in childhood. We have within us also abundant indications that we are mere sojourners. The sense of a hereafter, the instinctive stretching of the thoughts towards it, teach us the same lesson; while the voice of conscience sometimes shrieks, and sometimes whispers, Arise and depart hence: this is not your rest. You may, perhaps, have heaped up wealth, and used various methods, in order to persuade yourself that you are here at home, and you may be ready to exclaim, What, am I a mere sojourner, surrounded as I am by all this permanent prosperity? You are like a man upon a journey homeward, who should tarry at a wayside inn, and expend his time and money in furnishing and decking his temporary lodgings. And do you not at times feel yourself that it is so? Have you not often an uneasy sense of present insecurity and approaching change? And is not this sufficient to obscure the brightness of your precious metals, and to impair the verdure of your pleasant fields? And you, O men of pleasure, have not you the same experience? In the midst of your exciting and degrading pastimes, have you not paroxysms of alarm and restlessness? Amidst your voluntary madness, have you not your lucid intervals, in which you feel you are mere sojourners in a foreign country? All feel it; all know, though all will not allow themselves to act as if they knew that they are not at home, and that a journey is before them.

11. Now, this feeling of uneasiness, this sense of

homelessness, is, as you well know, incompatible with happiness. In order to be happy, you must have a home, either present or in prospect. Have you such a home? Remember that earthly homes, in reference to eternity, are nothing worth. Look at the households breaking up around you, and say whether these can be your solace and your stay forever. What will you do then? Will you waste yourselves in misanthropic discontent? No! do as Abraham did: look forward to the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. The more unsatisfactory you find this world, look the more eagerly and steadfastly on that which is to come. Are you just beginning life, and have you, as yet, experienced no vicissitudes? Oh, then, be wise beforehand. Do not wait till your heart is sickened and your temper soured by disappointment. But now, when your feelings are elastic, and your affections ardent, even now, look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

If, on the other hand, experience has taught you the treacherous hollowness of sinful pleasures, and your heart is almost breaking with defeated hopes, unsatisfied desires, and a sense of want, then have you the less excuse for looking any longer at those objects which you have already proved and found unsatisfactory. Oh, begin at last to look away from this world, with its cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces—look away from the baseless fabric of a vision, to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

12. But here let us guard against a fatal error—

the error of imagining that mere expectation is alone required. Believe me, multitudes have looked for that city who have never reached it. There is but one path to it through the wilderness of life, and that path is a narrow one. It was by that path that the Father of the Faithful gained the object of his faith and hope. If you would gain it likewise, you must walk in the footsteps of the Friend of God. Do you ask what path he travelled? I reply, the path of humble, childlike faith. We know from the life of Christ himself, that Abraham desired to see his day, and saw it, and was glad. It was faith in God's mercy, and that was counted to him for righteousness. It was a firm belief that God would set forth a propitiation for the sins of men, and a hearty acceptance of the pardon thus provided for himself.

These are the footsteps of the Father of the Faithful. If then you are merely looking forward to the happiness of heaven, without knowing or caring how it is to be obtained, learn from the example of Abraham, that you must renounce all sin and self-reliance, and believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your souls, if you would look, with any well-grounded hope, for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

13. And now let me turn to you who have your faces turned to Zion, and are already looking for that city to which Abraham aspired, and where he reigns in glory. It is said that when the caravan of pilgrims to the sepulchre of Christ cross the mountains of Judea, worn with hunger and fatigue, they are sometimes ready to relax their efforts and despair of safe

arrival. They may even repent of their own folly in attempting so adventurous a journey, and wish themselves in safety at their own distant firesides. But these thoughts all vanish when the summit is attained, and from the mountain's brow, they catch a glimpse of Olivet and Zion, and the Forsaken City seated in her widow's weeds upon her throne of hills. That sight reanimates their courage and renews their strength. With simultaneous energy they rise and hasten onward, and the roughness of the journey is forgotten in the presence of Jerusalem. Oh, brethren, we are also strangers and pilgrims, and our way through the world may be precipitous and rugged, and so long as we look only at the things around us, our hearts may well grow faint and our knees feeble. But amidst these trials and discouragements, look upward to the heavenly hills, and through the dust and smoke of this world's troubles, keep the Eternal City steadfastly in view. That sight will make your hearts beat with new vigor. It will nerve your arm for battle and your bosom for resistance. It will enable you to look down with contempt upon the pleasures and temptations of the world; it will preserve you from illusions, painful even to the Christian, and ah! how often fatal to the unbeliever. With such illusions, we may rest assured the world, the church, the experience and the souls of men are ever teeming.

Upon one or two such, I may dwell for a moment in conclusion. If the scenes which I describe are but ideal, they may serve, at least, as types of a most solemn reality. Let us imagine that we see one standing, even now, upon an eminence, a rising ground

in life, and looking forwards. He sees nothing but green fields and waving forests—all is fresh and all is smiling—an unruffled stream of pleasure rolls through his imaginary landscape, and the distinctions which he hopes for, rise like mountains in the distance. Upon these delightful and inspiring objects his eye rests and feeds. He has no desire to look beyond them. At times, indeed, he may catch a momentary glimpse of something bright, and towering above the highest of the heights before him. Sometimes, when the sun breaks out with sudden splendour from behind a cloud, it seems to be reflected, for an instant, from a thousand glittering points, as though there were a city in the sky. But in a moment it is gone, and he forgets it, or congratulates himself that he is no enthusiast, to give up the real and substantial splendours of the scene before him in exchange for cloud-built palaces and castles in the air.

This proud reflection brings him back, with new complacency, to the Elysian fields which lie before him, and he drinks in with new pleasure the delightful sights and sounds presented to his senses. No wonder then that he refuses to listen, or listens only with incredulous contempt, to the fanatic who would tell him that this fairy prospect is a cheat, a mere illusion—that its colours fade and its music ceases, on a near approach, and that the city in the clouds, which he supposed he saw, is not only real, but the only refuge from approaching dangers. He turns with pity or disgust from such forebodings, and then passes on, until he stands upon the verge of the eminence from which he has been gazing. He looks

down into the valley, and beholds with fresh delight, its verdure and its fruits—its sunshine and its shade. He envies the retirement of its peaceful hamlets, and listens with awe to the distant murmur of its populous cities. All seems delightful—all substantial—and above all, near at hand.

Enchanted with the prospect, he contemplatively lifts his eyes to yonder dim horizon, as if to satisfy himself that there is nothing there to lure him onward. And nothing does he see but fleecy clouds, or "the body of the heavens in its clearness." Or if he does for an instant see again that strange unearthly gleam, and catch a faint sound like the dying swell of distant music, the flash is transient, and the sound no sooner heard than it is hushed. He pauses for a moment at the point where the upward and the downward paths diverge; he looks up the narrow winding way into the mountains, and then plunges into that which leads him gently down through groves and gardens into the deep valley. Once and again he may stand still to listen as a voice of warning comes again upon his ear. But his election has been made. He passes downward and still downward, guided by the hum of distant voices, and the gentle rush of water far below. He observes with surprise that as he passes on, the distant prospect still seems bright and beautiful, but objects near at hand have no such charms. However far he journeys, the green fields are still as far off as at first; the fields around him appear parched and barren. Flowers are in the distance, but at hand are thorns and briers. Gardens like that of the Hesperides are yonder, but here a

garden like that of the sluggard, full of weeds and unenclosed. He begins to imagine that all nature droops and fades at his approach. The grass seems to wither where his footsteps fall; his breath seems to poison vegetation and the atmosphere. The healthful airs of heaven become hot winds of the desert when they touch his cheek; and the glassy streams which were to slake his thirst dry up as he bends over them, and leave a putrid slime in their forsaken channels. The birds whose song allured him, become owls or vultures, or drop lifeless from the branches. Hamlets and cities turn to rocks and sandhills; and the shadowing trees, now leafless, leave his head exposed to scorching rays from an unclouded sun. As he looks up to tell him how he hates his beams, his torment is enhanced by another passing glimpse of that mysterious city in the clouds above the mountain tops, and another dying echo of its music. In despairing spite he stops his ears and hastens onwards, and the heat soon grows more tolerable, for the sun is hidden and the sky is overcast. Winds begin to howl and whistle; thunders mutter angrily, and a thousand echoes from the hills around proclaim the coming tempest. The very earth beneath him quakes, and the illusions of the fairy landscape cease, and cease for ever. All, all is desolate, not even a shelter from the driving rain. The traveller looks desperately around for refuge from the storms of life, and then madly plunges into some dark cavern of pre-eminent iniquity; and now unable to arrest his progress, passes furiously onwards in the midst of darkness and strange noises, till he suddenly comes forth into the light of day upon the

margin of a precipice. With convulsive energy he pauses on the brink; for nature sickens at the gulf below, and the instinct of self-preservation gives him strength to stop, but only for a moment. The impulse of his downward progress is too strong to be resisted, and a fierce wind from behind still pursues him. Forced to look down, his brain begins to swim; he loses his balance; he falls in; he sinks; he catches with the strength of desperation at a twig or a projecting point, and looks up from the mouth of that devouring chasm with a piercing shriek for mercy. And in that last, dying, and despairing upward look, he is entirely and forever undeceived. He knows what he has done, and oh, unutterable anguish! he knows to a degree which plants a thousand daggers in his dying soul, he knows what he has lost. For there, far above him, at the end of the narrow path which he despises, is the city in the sky which he had learned to laugh at as a baseless vision. But he sees it no longer as a shadowy pile of clouds. Its walls and battlements are of adamant; its deep foundations reach beyond the view of the lost sinner, as he loses his last hold upon the upper world, and after unavailing and convulsive struggles, sinks, sinks, like lead in the mighty waters, his eye still fixed upon that city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God, until it is withdrawn to be fixed forever upon sights, which, God forbid that you or I should ever see.

Let me for one moment shift the scene, and show you another instance of illusion equally powerful, but oh how different in its nature and its end! Let me show you a small company of pilgrims, who have

chosen the rough, narrow, upward path which leads away from the green valley into the recesses of the bleak and barren mountains. Some you might see passing onwards with alacrity, forgetting all below them and behind them, or remembering it only to accelerate their progress towards that city with foundations, upon which their eyes are fastened. It is not of these that I would speak.

Others I might show you pressing on in the same course as long as sunshine lasts, or moonlight gilds the pinnacles of yonder city; but when black clouds hide the sky, and thick mists veil the earth, they avert their faces, they begin to linger, and to cast a longing glance into the depth below them, where the world and its temptations are arrayed in fatal splendour, and from which the voice of mirth and business constantly ascends, until sooner or later they hang over the edge with too intense a curiosity, and what follows is only known by the sound of a heavy plunge in some depth below.

But it is not of these that I would speak. It is of one who neither lingers nor looks back, nor gazes down into the valley, but whose face is still turned Zionward, whose progress though now faster and now slower is perceptible and constant. I wish to show you one who, while he thus moves onward in the right direction, is no less the subject of illusion than the wretch whose end I have described to you.

He journeys towards the heavenly city, but he sees it not. Jerusalem is in his heart, but not before his eyes. He even dreams that he has taken the wrong path. Imagination magnifies the dangers of

the journey. Every step appears to lead into some hidden snare, and every stone to be the mark of some deep pitfall. Every thicket is an ambush; every dark spot an expected place of conflict. The hardy plants that bloom along the rugged path seem poisonous; the springs provided by the Master for his pilgrims are passed by in timid and suspicious thirst. And when at length the body sinks exhausted and in need of slumber, all seems lost; and the man of little faith sleeps in the belief that he shall never wake. And when he does awake, it is only to a repetition of the same illusion. He is still afraid that he shall never reach the city. He is still unable to discover it in the distance; he will not look for it, but keeps his eyes fixed on the ground; or if he looks, he will not look to the right point; or if he looks to the right point, he finds the mist too dense, or the light too bright for his diseased vision. Or if he sees the object, he refuses to believe his senses, and suspects delusion on the only point where he is free from it.

Thus goes the doubter on, often ready to lie down and die, and sometimes tempted to go back or turn aside, but still moving onward because Christ is in his heart, and the secret hope that, notwithstanding all his fears, he shall yet appear in Zion before God. But see, the prospect changes. Real dangers now arise. The storm which deluges the valley sweeps across the mountain also. The doubting Christian gives up all for lost. But the very dangers which alarm his fears, quicken his footsteps, and although he may believe that he is going wrong, the tempest and the earthquake drive him on and up, until the

last ascent is gained, until the last cloud breaks away, and he who thought himself approaching to the verge of an abyss, finds himself standing on an everlasting rock, and at the threshold of an everlasting door. If shame can then be felt, he blushes as he looks back for a moment at the scene of his imaginary terrors, which now seem so sweet; the sun breaks out upon the path which he has trodden, and gladdens every dark spot where he wept or trembled; the noises which once terrified him and have still pursued him, now begin to blend with shouts and songs of triumph within; the everlasting doors lift up their heads, and with one farewell look at earth's baseless fabrics, the emancipated soul enters, never to return, the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

XV.

1 Thessalonians 5, 25.—Brethren, pray for us.

This brief request, standing, as it does, in a series of laconic exhortations, is a striking illustration of the importance which the Scriptures attach to intercessory prayer. "Rejoice evermore," "pray without ceasing," "quench not the Spirit," "despise not prophesyings," "prove all things, hold fast that which is good," "abstain from all appearance of evil;" these are some of the precepts with which it stands connected. With an evident design to close his epistle with a series of pointed practical directions, the apostle gives a place among them not only to the general precept, "pray without ceasing," but also to the special request, "brethren, pray for us." The request itself is one very frequently repeated in the Pauline epistles, under different forms, but always expressive of the writer's confidence in the real efficacy of such intercessions, as means of spiritual good to himself, and of furtherance to the glorious cause in which he was engaged. To the Hebrews, Paul says, "Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly; but I beseech you the rather to do this,

that I may be restored to you the sooner." (Heb. 13, 18. 19.) The same request is made to the Romans with reference to the same result, but with greater earnestness of importunity. "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea, that my service for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed." (Rom. 15, 30–32.) In asking the same favour, and exacting the same duty of the Ephesians, he sets before them, as the end to be attained, his greater fidelity and success in the performance of his ministerial functions, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, *and for me*, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." (Eph. 6, 18–20.)

In all these passages there are several points of resemblance, connecting them together, and identifying them as characteristic manifestations of one and the same Spirit, the same personality. In the first place, there is the absorption of the whole soul, with its powers and affections, in the one great object of the writer's life. In the next place, there is the habitual disposition to do something more than think of it, or wish for its attainment, the disposition to employ with energy the necessary means and all the means available. In the third

place, there is the appearance, or rather the conclusive evidence of a thorough persuasion, that among these means the prayers of true believers held a place and an important place; that the apostle asked them and enjoined them, not merely as a salutary exercise to those whom he addressed, not merely as a token of affection and of confidence on his part towards them, but as a real efficacious means to the attainment of that end for which he lived and was prepared to die, as actually helping him, procuring him divine grace, and in a certain sense securing his success, and even his salvation.

This idea, which is not obscurely implied, in the passages already quoted, is distinctly expressed in others, as when writing to the Church at Corinth, after speaking of the dangers and sufferings from which God had delivered him, he adds, "in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us, ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf." (2 Cor. 1, 10. 11.) But the strongest expression of this confidence, in connection with the great apostle's governing desire, and we may almost say his ruling passion, is contained in his address to the Philippians, with respect to one of the severest trials which he had experienced. "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all

boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death; for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1, 18–21.)

With this sublime expression of humility and triumph, of indifference and superiority to life and death, and at the same time of believing reliance on the power even of human intercession, I close the examples of Paul's habitual desire and entreaty for the prayers of others. What has been cited will suffice to show that, at his own request, and in obedience to his own command, "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him," (Acts 12, 5,) throughout the wide field of his apostolic labours, in Italy, in Greece, in Asia Minor, and in Palestine; at Rome, at Corinth, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Ephesus, and among the churches of the Hebrew Christians. This extensive organization of a systematic and concerted intercession, in behalf of the apostle and his work, is a practical demonstration that he not only believed in the necessity and efficacy of prayer in general, but of intercession in particular, and that so far from regarding the ministry or even the apostleship as superior to this means of grace, as exempted from the need of it, he looked upon the exaltation of his office, and the greatness of his work, as creating a peculiar and more urgent necessity for this assistance, that his official movements, and his intercourse with the churches might be unobstructed; that his mouth might be opened to speak boldly as he ought to speak; that the very trials and discouragements with which he met might tend to the salvation

of himself and others, and that, whether living or dying, he might gain his darling end, that of magnifying Christ. With such an end in view, and with such convictions of the means by which it was to be accomplished, Paul uttered volumes when he wrote these four words, *Brethren, pray for us.*

Let us now consider, for a moment, whether Paul regarded this important spiritual service as incumbent only upon others towards himself, or whether he expected it to be reciprocal, both as an obligation and a benefit. The solution of this question will be greatly facilitated, and the result rendered far more striking, by applying the inquiry to those very churches upon which we have seen the apostle so importunately calling for their intercessions. Near the end of his epistle to the Romans, we have heard him asking "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and for the love of the Spirit," that they would strive together with him in prayer to God for him. (Rom. 15, 30.) The prayers of the apostle, in which they are asked to join, might seem to be prayers only for himself and for his work. But near the beginning of the same epistle, with a solemn appeal to the Searcher of hearts, expressing his anxiety to be believed, and implying the importance of the fact in question, he says, "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, (still keeping in his own view and the view of others his official relations to the Church and to its head,) that without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayers." (Rom. 1, 9.) Observe the strength of the expressions, always, without ceasing, lest he should be understood as speaking only of

periodical or occasional intercession, and not of the habitual and constant burden of his prayers. What follows might indeed seem to describe even Paul's own prayers, as having reference simply to himself, "making request if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you." (Rom. 1, 10.) But how utterly unselfish even this desire was, breaks out in the next sentence, "for I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established." (Rom. 1, 11.) It was for their sake that he thus desired to come to them, yet likewise for his own, "that is that I may be comforted together with you, or jointly comforted in you, by the mutual faith both of you and me," (Rom. 1, 12,) a beautiful expression of the truth that he who prays for others not only will pray for himself, but does so in the very act of intercession, by identifying his own spiritual interest with that of those for whom he prays, and regarding every blessing granted to them as being more or less directly a blessing to himself.

We have seen that Paul prayed for the Romans always, without ceasing. In like manner he says to the Ephesians, (1, 15. 16,) "I, also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love to all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." Here again the constancy of his intercessions is particularly mentioned; but there are two additional circumstances not to be neglected. The one is, that the apostle's prayers for the Ephesian Christians, included thanksgiving for what they were already and had already experienced. The other is,

that these attainments in the spiritual life, although calling for grateful recognition, did not preclude the necessity of earnest prayer that God would grant to them the spirit of wisdom and of revelation, in the knowledge of him and of the riches of that glorious salvation to which he had called them. Gratitude for past gifts did but stir up the apostle to ask more. To the Philippians, through whose prayer the Apostle knew that even his sorest trials should turn to his salvation, (Phil. 1. 19,) he says, as he said to the Ephesians, "I thank my God upon every mention or remembrance of you, *always, in every prayer of mine* for you all, making request with joy." (Phil. 1, 3. 4.) Here again the prayer is a daily, a perpetual prayer, a thankful, nay, a joyful prayer, a prayer for further, greater gifts, increasing knowledge, holiness and usefulness, as instruments in glorifying God—"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may be sincere and without offence until the day of Jesus Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God." (Phil. 1, 9. 11.) To the same Thessalonians whom Paul exhorts to pray without ceasing, (1 Thess. 5, 17,) and to pray for him, (ib. 5, 25,) he could say and does say, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers," (1 Thess. 1, 2.)—and again, with his favourite combination of thanksgiving, joy, and importunate desire—"What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we

might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?" (1 Thess. 3, 9. 10.) As he shows how far he was from stagnant acquiescence in what he had obtained already for them, by his prayers for their advancement in the spiritual life, so he shows how far he is from flattering their spiritual pride, by making the deficiency of their faith a reason for continuing to pray even for those whose actual attainments he regarded as a matter of gratitude and joy. In the same spirit, he says in another epistle to the same Thessalonians, "we pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thess. 1, 11. 12.) I shall only add, under this head, that for the same Corinthians, whom Paul describes as helping together by prayer for him and his associates, he prays to God, in the same epistle, that they may do no evil, and rising still higher, that they may be perfect. (2 Cor. 13, 7. 9.)

It is surely no fortuitous coincidence, that in these five cases, the same persons, whose prayers he importunately asks for himself, are represented as the subjects of his own unceasing, thankful, joyful, fervent intercessions. The general inference is therefore obvious enough, that one of the most uniform and intimate relations which subsisted between Paul and his spiritual children, throughout the vast field of his labours, was that of mutual intercession, not as a mere interchange of spiritual compliments, but as an

indispensable and efficacious means of grace. That this was not an incident of the apostleship, a relation growing out of any thing peculiar in the circumstances under which these Christians were converted, is clear, not only from the absence of any terms implying such restriction, and from the fact that Paul's fellow-labourers are more than once apparently included with himself in the profession and request, but also from the obvious consideration that, as soon as we are able to perceive and willing to admit the existence of sufficient reasons for this mutual relation in the case of the apostle and his spiritual children, every one of these reasons bears with double force upon the case of other ministers and other converts. If they who had received the gospel under the impression of inspired preaching and attended by the tokens of miraculous power, needed still the wrestling intercessions of the man of God, to shield them against danger, to preserve them from error, and to fill up what was lacking of their faith, how much more must this necessity exist, or rather, how much clearer is it, in the case of those who have had no such outward pledges of divine interposition. And if he, clothed with extraordinary powers, accredited from heaven by the signs of an apostle, had occasion so repeatedly and earnestly to ask the prayers of others for his personal safety and the progress of his work, how much more pressing should the sense of this necessity be on the hearts of those who with ordinary powers are called to the same difficult and responsible work.

If these considerations are sufficient to extend the

application of the principle involved in the precepts and the practice of Paul, to all Christ's ministers and those who are in any sense their spiritual children, it is easy to foresee that the very same reasoning will carry us still further, and require us to recognize the right and duty of mutual intercession as extending to all Christians, and as arising, not from any peculiar official relations, but from a common character and interest. Whatever special motives and incitements to the duty may be afforded by the mutual relations of the teacher and the taught, the spiritual father and the spiritual children, the essential ground of the necessity in question must lie back of these, in something not confined to these relations, but existing in the common experience of all believers. Especially is this the case if we regard the right and duty of mutual intercession, not as a mere token of affection, but as an appointed and effective means of grace, as well to those who ask as those for whom they ask. If God has indeed ordained this as an efficacious instrument of spiritual good, it cannot be supposed that he intended to restrict its use and operation to the case of those who sustain what may be called an accidental relation to each other in the family of Christ. The necessity of mutual intercession may indeed appear to some to be so clearly involved in the admitted necessity of prayer in general, as to supersede all argument for or against it. The difference between prayer for others and ourselves, being merely circumstantial; the essence of the prayer, as consisting in sincere desire addressed to God, for some thing in accordance with his will, is of course the same in

either case. The exclusive object of address is still the same. The same moral qualities, sincerity, humility and faith, are requisite in both to make the prayer acceptable. The warrant of encouragement to pray, in either case, is furnished by God's mercy in the precious promises with which his word abounds. There is but one throne of grace and one way of access to it. The meritorious intercession of the Son, and the auxiliary intercession of the Spirit, are in all cases equally necessary.

Why then should the question even be propounded, Whether prayer for others is a right and duty of all Christians? Not of course because the answer is in any measure doubtful, or the grounds on which it rests in any measure recondite or susceptible of novel illustration, but simply because a brief consideration of these grounds may serve to place the duty in its proper place, not only as a duty, but as an important means of grace. Because we are familiar with the precepts and examples of the Scriptures on this subject, it does not follow that truth respecting it might have been inferred as a matter of course from the general teachings of God's word respecting prayer, even without specific teachings as to this kind of prayer. It is conceivable, to say the least, that the efficacious influence of prayer might have been confined to the suppliant himself. Christian benevolence, it is true, must prompt him to desire the good of others, and to use the necessary means for its promotion. But this might not have been among the number. The power of men to help each other might have been restricted to the use of physical and moral means externally. Such an

arrangement is indeed so foreign from our scriptural associations and habitual ideas as to the duty and the means of doing good to one another, that we may find it hard to form a definite idea of it as really existing. But as no man can believe, or repent, or obey for another; as each man must in this respect bear his own burden; as the wants and dangers of each are numberless, requiring all the grace that he can ask; it would not be absurd, in the absence of explicit revelation and experience, to suppose that every man was called upon to pray for himself, for the pardon of his own sins, for the sanctification of his own corrupt nature, for his own deliverance from the power of temptation, and his own preparation for the joys of heaven, without presuming to address the throne of grace in behalf of any other, however strong his sympathy, however ardent his desires for their good. Such a supposition, however foreign from the actual state of things is, in itself, no more surprising than that all participation in the faith, repentance and obedience of each other, is impossible to true believers, however earnestly they may desire to supply each other's lack of faith or service, or to bear each other's burdens. On these grounds, and in this sense, the right and duty of intercessory prayer, however certain and familiar, may be represented as a doctrine of revelation, rather than a necessary rational deduction from the necessity of prayer in general, as a means of procuring the divine favour, and an immediate source of salutary spiritual influence. This view of the matter, so far from obscuring the glory of divine grace as beheld in the economy of man's salvation, greatly enhances

it by making that a free gift, a gratuitous concession, which might otherwise have seemed to be a natural necessity. If men might justly have been suffered to pray only for themselves, as they are actually suffered to repent and believe only for themselves, then the privilege of doing good to others by our prayers, and of deriving benefit from theirs, is a distinguishing feature in the gospel system, and a notable instance of divine compassion. That the system does, in point of fact, include such a provision, is a proposition which requires no proof. That it occupies a prominent position, and is insisted on as highly important, is sufficiently established by Paul's precept and example as already exhibited. We have seen that with a frequency and emphasis too marked to be mistaken, he addresses to the same persons urgent requests for their prayers in his behalf, and strong asseverations of his constancy in prayer for them. We have seen that the blessings which he hopes to obtain through their intercession, are deliverance from danger, consolation under sorrow, but especially boldness and success in his ministry, and more abundant honour to the name of Christ; while the mercies which he asks on their behalf are steadfastness, increase of faith, of love, of knowledge, more abundant usefulness, and full salvation. From these examples we may easily deduce a safe and comprehensive rule as to the objects and the compass of our intercession.

The induction may however be made more extensive by inquiring briefly what other cases are particularly mentioned in connection with this duty, that is to say for whom and for what the Scriptures teach

us either by precept or example that we may or ought to intercede. The right and duty once established, it is true, there can be no practical difficulty in applying the principle to special cases, any more than in applying the general rule of charity or Christian love. It has pleased God, however, to incite and regulate our best affections, not by general rules merely, but by particular directions and examples, so as to leave us under no doubt either with respect to our right and duty in the general, or to particular cases and emergencies. Lest the mention of some cases should be understood as simply exclusive of all others, we have general precepts of the largest kind. "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, should be made for all men," then with a distinct specification of a certain class, "for kings, and all that are in authority," not merely for their own sake, but for the peace of society and the edification of the church, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1 Tim. 2, 1. 2.) But while we are thus authorized and taught to pray for men in general, and for that class on whom the peace and welfare of the whole depend, we are especially encouraged to expect a blessing on our prayers for true believers, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." (Eph. 6, 18.) A different apostle exhorts believers to "pray one for another," (James 5, 16,) that they "may be healed," whether of bodily or spiritual maladies, for both are mentioned in the context. This peculiar obligation to pray for

all saints does not destroy our right to pray for sinners, and especially for those who are particularly near to us. While we pray that saints may be saved from error and from temporal distress, we should pray that sinners may be saved from death and everlasting ruin. Paul's heartfelt desire and prayer to God for Israel was "that they might be saved." (Rom. 10, 1.) So intense was his desire for this blessing that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh." (Rom. 9, 3.)

While these specifications teach us that the most expansive Christian benevolence has no need to consider itself straitened in God, there are others to warn us against being straitened in ourselves. As we are taught not to restrain prayer before God on account of exceptions which we may suppose him to have made, so likewise we are taught not to restrain it on account of exceptions which we make ourselves. To pray for children may be deemed a thankless or a needless form; and so when "there were brought unto" our Saviour "little children that he should put his hands on them and pray, the disciples rebuked those that brought them, but when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased and said, suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven, and he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." This was an exercise of his divine prerogative. The only way in which a mere man can effectually bless is by invoking the blessing of God, *i. e.*, by praying for the object. This example of the Saviour, therefore, furnishes a rule for our intercessions, by teaching

us that even little children may be prayed for. Here the exception, if made at all, would rest on the supposed insignificance of the object.

But there are other cases where a deeper feeling and a stronger motive may be supposed to hinder intercession. To pray for fellow-Christians is an obligation easily acknowledged. To pray even for sinners if they be our friends, can scarcely be denied to be a duty. To pray for those unknown to us, or those to whom we are indifferent, is still an obligation which may be externally discharged at least without repugnance. But to pray for enemies might seem to be impossible, or if possible, extravagant, the mere romance of charity, if we did not know it to be the glory of the Christian morality, the triumph of the gospel over Jew and Gentile. "Ye have heard that it hath been said thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." (Matt. 5, 44.) Well might the Saviour add to such a precept, "be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." No religion or morality but that which aims at the highest perfection could find place for such a privilege or such a duty. Nay, not only are our enemies to be the subjects of our intercessions, but forgiveness of injuries is made the condition of our being heard at all for others or ourselves. By this variety of precept and example, we are not only assured of our right and duty to pray for others as well as for ourselves, but are taught, in every variety of form, that in our

application of the general rule, we need make no exceptions on account of the unworthiness or insignificancy of the object prayed for, and we must make no exceptions, in compliance with a spirit of malignant partiality. Nevertheless, we may and must pray more earnestly for some than others. While we own the obligation to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men, and especially for kings and all in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, it is natural and right that we should pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and even among these we may pray with special emphasis for God's ambassadors, that utterance may be given them, or for his new-born children that they may be sincere and without offence until the day of Jesus Christ. We may pray for all men, but there are some who have a special right to say to us and we to them, *Brethren, pray for us.*

To the questions, may we pray for others? must we pray for others? a sufficient answer seems to have been given from the word of God. To the further question, whether we sufficiently appreciate the value of this doctrine, and its influence upon the whole condition of the Christian, we may all, perhaps, safely and sincerely answer no. In order to recover or obtain a correct notion of the value of salvation, it is not unusual to recur to the position that without injustice, and without detracting even from his goodness, God might have left the world to perish without hope. But even supposing that he meant to save

some from eternal misery, he might have left them in a dubious state of mingled good and evil like the present life. Or even if he meant to make them ultimately blessed, he might have suffered ages of expurgatory suffering to intervene. But God has magnified the riches of his wisdom, power, and grace, by revealing a method of total deliverance from evil, and of introduction to eternal bliss, directly subsequent to the present state. The transition of the saved is not from darkness into an eternal twilight, or through twilight into a far-distant day. It is from darkness to light, from total darkness to unclouded light, from death to life, from hell to heaven, from the power of Satan unto God. And yet so familiar are our minds with this great doctrine, that we compare it only with itself, forgetting the innumerable terrible alternatives which might have been presented. Forgetting what might have been, we look upon what is as that which must be, and detract so much from our inducements to adore the saving grace of God. Now the error thus committed with respect to the whole method of salvation, may be repeated likewise with respect to many of the particular provisions comprehended in it. By regarding what is actually done as the result of a fatal necessity, we fail to consider what our condition might have been, and thus withhold from God a large share of the praise which would have been extorted from us by a view of what he has gratuitously added to the bare hope of deliverance from hell. He might have left us as it were within its jaws, and hanging over the abyss of fire. He might have left us on its verge enveloped in its thick smoke,

and deafened by its ascending shrieks; in a word, he might have done immeasureably less for us, and yet have saved us. To borrow a single illustration from the subject which has been before us, God might have given us the hope and promise of eternal life, and yet excluded us till death from all communion with himself, from all approach to him in prayer. Oh, what a dispensation even of free mercy, yet without a throne of grace, or way of access to the Father! Or again, he might have suffered us to pray, but only for ourselves, without the right of intercession on behalf of others, or the hope of human intercession for ourselves. The way in which we are affected by this supposition may perhaps afford a measure of the value which we put upon the privilege. If we regard it with indifference, its practical value is, to us, as nothing. If we shrink from the idea of a different arrangement with sincere aversion, it can only be because we estimate in some degree aright that wonderful provision of God's mercy which, by suffering his redeemed ones to pray not only for themselves, but for others, with the hope of being heard, and with the promise of the Holy Ghost to aid their infirmities, establishes an intimate connection between every renewed soul and every other, through the throne of grace; a subtle and mysterious power, by which one may reach another—nay, may reach a thousand—nay, may reach a world, and be himself the object of as many influences as he thus puts forth; of influences tending all exclusively to good, for God will not hear the prayer of malice and hypocrisy, nor answer that of well-meant ignorance;—one soul interceding for all

saints, and all saints, as it were, for one—sending up the exhalation of a pure desire for others, and receiving in return a rain of heavenly influence; each drop, each shower, representing the petition of some pious heart, on which his own prayers had invoked a blessing, either individually, or as one in the nameless but beloved company of "all saints," for which the Bible taught him, and the Spirit prompted him, and aided him to pray! The hope of such a recompense, even in this life, together with the impulse and variety imparted by a man's prayers for others to his prayers for his own soul, may well incite us both to utter and obey more readily the precept of the text; like Paul, to "*pray without ceasing*" for the brethren; like Paul, to say, "*Brethren, pray for us!*"

XVI.

Revelation 14, 12.—Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

The duty, necessity, and good effects of patience, are often set forth in the word of God. This is the more remarkable, because, by the wisdom of the world, patience, unless accompanied by selfish cunning, or a proud contempt of others, is regarded rather as a weakness than a virtue. Strongly contrasted with this vulgar estimate of patience, is the prominence with which it is exhibited, commended, and enjoined in Scripture. The application of the term, however, by the sacred writers, does not coincide exactly with its ordinary usage. Nor is its use in Scripture altogether uniform. The name is sometimes applied to the humble, submissive endurance of suffering; sometimes to consistent perseverance in any good course. It is used, however, in a higher sense, including both the others; and even where the lower sense would seem appropriate, there is often at least an allusion to the higher. Evangelical or spiritual patience is not mere resignation to the ills of life and the dispensations of Providence, nor mere

perseverance in the path of duty, although neither of these can really exist without it. It is something more than either, or than both combined, that is described in Scripture as the characteristic patience of the saints, or, as it is frequently expressed, their patient *waiting upon* God.

This English phrase, to *wait upon*, has gradually undergone a change of meaning. In modern usage it denotes a personal service or attendance, either literal, as when the servant waits upon his master, or metaphorical, as when one friend is said to wait upon another. The original words which it is used to represent signify simply the act of waiting for, including expectation and a personal interest in the thing expected. This, too, is the primary import of the English phrase itself, *waiting upon* and *waiting for*, having been once synonymous, and being often interchanged in our translation of the Bible. As applied to servants it expresses strictly nothing more than their habitual expectation of their master's orders. Its general sense of service or attendance, is a secondary one, derived from this. In those parts of Scripture where the duty of waiting upon God is explained or enforced, the idea of serving him is certainly implied, but the direct and primary meaning of the phrase, is that of waiting for, expecting God, his presence, his favour, the fulfilment of his promises, as well as the utterance of his commands. That state of mind which waits for God in this sense, is spiritual patience. The Apostle's declaration to the Hebrews, "Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God ye may inherit the

promise," (Heb. 10, 36,) seems, at first sight, to mean merely that the complete fulfilment of the promise would be long deferred, or, in other words, that they must wait long for it, because it could not take place until after they had done the will of God. But the words are applicable, in a higher sense, to the necessity of spiritual patience, as a characteristic and essential element of Christian life, without which no one can perform either part of the great work described, *i. e.* can either do the will of God, or be partaker of his promises. The same necessity is intimated by the same apostle, in the same epistle, when he expresses his desire that those to whom he writes may be followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. (Heb. 6, 12.) So far, indeed, as the necessity of any act, or habit, or affection, can be expressed by an exhortation to perform or cherish it, the necessity of spiritual patience may be said to be frequently alleged in scripture, both directly, as a matter of religious obligation, and indirectly, as an object of God's favour and a source of blessing. "Blessed are all they that wait for him." (Isaiah 30, 18.) "It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." (Lamentations 3, 26.) "The Lord is good to them that wait for him—to the soul that seeketh him." (Ib. 25.) This patient waiting upon God, is represented not only as acceptable to him, and as a source of good in general, but of specific benefits, without which spiritual life can never flourish, if it can exist. For example, it is represented as a source of strength, *i. e.* spiritual strength, the power of performance, and ordinance, and re-

sistance—of withstanding evil and of doing good. This strength, the soul, convinced of its own weakness, cannot cease to long for, since, without it, it can neither do that which is pleasing in the sight of God nor shun that which offends him. Now this strength is exhibited in Scripture, not as the result of any natural power, inherent or acquired, nor external advantages, defences, safeguards, and facilities of action, but of patient reliance upon God. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord." (Isaiah 27, 14.) It is indeed contrasted with all other means and causes of strength, as being the only one that can be trusted, while all the rest are imperfect and delusive. Even the strongest who rely on these, shall fail and be exhausted; but "they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40, 31.)

So far from warning us against excess in the employment of this means for the recruiting of our spiritual strength, the Scripture points it out as the highway to perfection—"only let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"—not only perfect and entire in patience, but in all that spiritual patience tends to generate and foster. (James 1, 4.) It is presented likewise as the only security against the disappointment and frustration of our strongest confidence and highest trust. They who rely upon themselves or upon any other creature for this same security, shall surely be confounded; but God himself has said, "they shall not

be ashamed," *i. e.* according to the usage of the Bible, disappointed and betrayed, "that wait for are." (Isaiah 49, 23.) This assurance against future disappointment comprehends within its scope the highest hopes of the believer, the reality of which is expressly connected with the exercise of patience. "They that wait on the Lord shall inherit the land." (Psalm 37, 9.) "Wait on the Lord and keep his way; he shall exalt thee to inherit the land." (Ib. 34.) Nay, eternal life is spoken of as sure only "to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality." (Romans 2, 7.)

Such are the terms in which the duty, necessity, and blessed fruits of patience are exhibited in Scripture. The very strength of the expressions and the comprehensive nature of the promises which they involve, might suffice to show that the patience of which such things are affirmed is neither resignation, fortitude, nor constancy of purpose, but something more than either, though inclusive of them all. The idea of patience, in its ordinary sense, is of course presupposed. That the heavenly patience thus enjoined and blessed, is, like all other patience, tranquil and quiet, the negation and the opposite of turbulence, disorder, and undue excitement, is clear, not only from the name applied to it, but also from the declaration, "it is good that a man should hope and *quietly wait* for the salvation of the Lord," (Lamentations 3, 26,) and from the junction of the two commands, "*rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him*," (Psalm 37, 7.) Is it then a mere inert quiescence, a stagnation of the soul, without affection or activity, that God's word sets be-

fore us, as a duty, as a necessary source of strength, and as the highway to perfection. Such a conclusion is well suited to the tendency of human nature to extremes; but if it were correct, the Apostle could never have used such a combination—in exhorting the Hebrew Christians—"*that ye be not slothful*, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Hebrews 6, 12.) The patience that is heir to the promises of God, is therefore not a mere negation, not a stagnant patience, not a slothful patience. It is urged on to action by a potent principle, the love of God, without which patient waiting, in the true sense, is impossible. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ." (2 Thess. 3, 5.)

But this divine love may itself be personated by a mere inert affection or by a corrupt one, which refuses to be subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. He has therefore taught us that obedience to his will is an essential characteristic of true patience —"Wait on the Lord" and "*keep his way*," *i. e.* walk in the way of his commandments, are inseparable precepts, forming, not severally but together, the condition of the promise: "he shall exalt thee to inherit the land." (Ps. 37, 34.) They for whom glory, and honour, and immortality, and eternal life are reserved, are they who seek it, not simply by patient continuance, but by patient continuance *in well-doing*. (Rom. 2, 7.) "Ye have need of patience, that *after ye have done the will of God*, ye may inherit the promise." (Hebrews 10, 36.) The patience of the saints, then, is neither an inactive nor a lawless patience, but a lov-

ing and obedient patience. The same perverse tendency which leads men to convert *quiet and patient waiting* for salvation, into absolute inaction or a disregard of duty, will lead them to convert the requisition of obedience into an exhortation to reliance on themselves or their own meritorious service. But the patience of the saints is a believing patience, which not only believes the truth, but trusts the promises —a trust implying self-renunciation and despair of self salvation; for without these an implicit trust in God's grace is impossible. It is through *faith and patience*, a patient trust and a believing patience, that the saints in glory have inherited the promises. From such a faith, hope is inseparable. He who would not be slothful, but a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises, must do so by "showing diligence" in every duty "to the full assurance of *hope* unto the end." (Heb. 6, 11.) The patience of the Scriptures springs neither from despair nor fear, but from hope, which is the opposite of both. It is not a mere quiet endurance of the present or a quiet retrospect of the past, but a quiet expectation; and that not a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, but an expectation of good—a hope —an assurance of hope; the more assured the hope the more perfect the patience; patience can have her perfect work only where there is full assurance of hope to the end—"For if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Romans 8, 25.) "It is good that a man should *hope and quietly wait* for the salvation of the Lord." (Lamentations 3, 26.)

The faith and hope which are thus represented as essential to the patience of the saints, are not merely a vague trust and expectation founded upon no sufficient reason, or simply on the attributes of God, or his promises in general, without regard to the restrictions and conditions by which they are accompanied, but a specific trust and expectation, having a definite object, reason and foundation. We have seen already that the exercise of Christian patience is described in Scripture as a patient waiting, not for something unknown—not for evil—not for good in the general, but for God. "Blessed are all they that wait for *Him*." (Is. 30, 18.) "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him." "Those that wait *on the Lord* shall inherit the earth." "Wait *on the Lord* and keep his way." "Wait *on the Lord* and he shall save thee." "They that wait *on the Lord* shall renew their strength." "The Lord is good to them that wait *for him*." "They shall not be ashamed that wait *for me*." Here is a definite object of patient expectation set before us. It is not mere *waiting*, nor mere *patient waiting* that will answer this description, but patient waiting for the Lord, by loving him, obeying him, believing him, confiding in him, seeking him. "The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that *seeketh* him."

The object of the Christian's patient expectation is made still more definite. It might be asked how or why should men wait for or expect the Lord? He will be forever what he is. He will be forever, as he is now, intimately present to his creatures. If the object of expectation be supposed to be some special

or extraordinary manifestation of his presence or his power, such an expectation would be apt to prove fanatical, and instead of promoting quietness and patience would more probably destroy it. But the definite object of the true believer's patient expectation is the manifestation of God's mercy in his own salvation, in his complete and final deliverance from suffering and from sin. "Wait on the Lord and he will save thee." (Proverbs 20, 22.) "It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for *the salvation of the Lord.*" But even here, the expectation of the Christian might be too vague to secure the exercise of genuine patience. He might look to God for salvation, but without understanding how it was to be procured or how it could be reconciled with the divine justice. While this doubt or ignorance existed, he could hardly rest with implicit trust even on God's mercy, and could not therefore be expected to possess his soul in patience. The only remedy for this uneasiness and restlessness of spirit, is a just apprehension, not only of God's nature as a merciful being, but of the precise way in which his mercy can and will be exercised, in which he can be just and yet justify the ungodly. In other words, the soul must not only see God as he is in himself, but see him in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them but imputing them to Christ, making him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The man whose hope is fixed, not on abstractions or on generalities, not even on the attributes of God, as such, nor on his promises at large, but on

the positive, distinct, specific promise of justification and salvation even to the chief of sinners, who renounces his own righteousness and submits to the righteousness of God, by a simple trust in the righteousness of Christ, that man may indeed be said to "wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." (Galatians 5, 5.) The attitude of that soul is indeed one of waiting, of patient waiting, of patient waiting for God, of patient waiting for the salvation of the Lord, of "love to God and patient waiting for Christ."

Beyond this it is impossible to go in making the object of our patient expectation either greater or more definite. He who waits for the hope of righteousness by faith, through the love of God and the patient waiting for Christ, may have a faint hope through his own infirmity, but cannot have a vague one through the vagueness of the object. His hope, and by necessary consequence, his patience, may be variable, fluctuating, and capricious, but not from any want of amplitude, or fulness, or distinctness in the object. The more he sees of that, the more profoundly tranquil and unbroken will the patience of his spirit be. If we know not what we hope for, or if we doubt of its reality or excellence, or of its being attainable by us, we may still have hope, but we cannot have patience. Our hope will be a restless, an unsteady, an impatient, a capricious hope. "But if we hope for that" which, though "we see not we believe" and know to be real and excellent and within our reach, "then, then, do we with patience wait for it," not because we no longer desire it, but because we do; not because we are willing to postpone the full fruition of

it, but because we are so filled with the joyful expectation and the assured hope of obtaining it at last, that we are willing to wait the will of Him on whom it all depends, and whom we know to be able to keep that with which we have entrusted him, until that day, however distant. This is the kind of hope that generates true patience; and if we would indeed "be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," let us lay aside our fluctuating, short-lived hopes, which are extinguished at the first blast or drowned by the first wave that washes over us, and let us not be slothful, but diligent in duty, in the full *assurance of hope* unto the end. (Hebrews 6, 11. 12.)

We have now seen reason to conclude that the patience of the true believer, though a state of rest is one of rest in God, and therefore not a slothful or inert one, but a diligent and active one; not lawless, but obedient; not compulsory, but willing; not fearful, but loving; not despondent, but hopeful; not vague, but definite; not resting on the reason, or the fancy, or on nothing, but on God, on Christ, on salvation, on the righteousness of faith; not capricious and short-lived, but constant, uniform, and persevering. The connection which has been already pointed out between this patience, and the love of God and faith in Christ, is a sufficient answer to the question, whence does this patience spring, by what is it produced, and how shall we obtain it? Are we still without the love of God and faith in Christ? Then patient waiting is for us impossible. We may wait long, we may wait forever, in the sense of doing nothing, sinking deeper in sin, and growing harder

under it; but if in the sense before explained we would possess our souls in patience, we must believe, and love, and hope. Faith lies at the foundation. Where faith is wanting, there can be no patience. With little faith there can be little patience. Not that the highest degrees of faith are necessary to a genuine patience; much less that faith which is assailed and tried can breed no patience. But of these trials, patience often springs; patience not only in the lower, but the higher sense; not only the passive power of endurance, but the active power of humble, hopeful, joyful, and believing expectation; "only let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing, knowing that *the trial of your faith worketh patience*." (Jas. 1, 3. 4.)

But this effect supposes an internal preparation, without which mere external trials of our faith, instead of working patience, would render it impossible. And this internal preparation can be wrought by nothing but a spiritual influence not only from without, but from above, from heaven, from God. None but the Holy Ghost can work in our darkened and corrupted heart, that humble, yet triumphant expectation of deliverance through the righteousness of Christ, which is the life of spiritual patience "For we *through the Spirit* wait for the hope of righteousness by faith," (Gal. 5, 5.) This hope, and the faith from which it springs, and the love to God by which it is accompanied, are all his gift. Patience and all the elements of which it is composed must come alike from him. The Lord alone can "direct [our] hearts into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ," (2 Thess.

3, 5.) The sum of all these Scriptures seems to be that there is a patience necessary to the Christian life, a patience which includes resignation and endurance, but includes far more; a patience which God approves, and upon which he has promised his blessing, as a source of strength and as a means of perfection; that this patience is a rest in God, not slothful but diligent, obedient, loving, and believing, springing from the hope of salvation through the righteousness of Christ and from faith in him, augmented even by the trial of that faith when it is genuine and does not fail; a patience wrought by the Holy Spirit directing our hearts into the love of God, and the patience of Christ, or patient waiting for him.

If in what has now been said, the declarations of the Scriptures should appear to be distorted from their natural, simple meaning as applied to patience in the lower sense, let it be considered in the first place, that some of the things predicated of patience in the Word of God are wholly inapplicable to a mere submissive temper, power of endurance, or freedom from uneasy restlessness and discontent. In the next place, let it be considered that the higher patience which the Word of God describes, and which the grace of God produces, so far from being opposed to the one just mentioned, or in any sense at variance with it, that it includes it as the whole includes the part, or as the spring includes the stream, or the plant its fruit or flower. While it still stands true, attested both by Scripture and experience, that a mere philosophical or natural patience can never lead to those results which are ascribed to Christian patience in

the Word of God, it is equally true and equally well ascertained, that this is the only certain and unfailing source of meekness, resignation, and tranquillity accessible to man. The patience of wrong, or suffering, or hope deferred, which springs from mere prudential motives or from self-control, can never rise higher than its fountain in the heart, and must therefore prove unequal to the greatest emergencies of human life. But break a man's heart with a conviction of sin, open the eyes to the impending danger, make him feel his incapacity to help himself, and his urgent need of superhuman help, then let him see Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, just such a Saviour as he needs, and has at last been made to wish for, let him understand and appreciate the freeness of the gospel offer, let him close with it in hearty acquiescence by a true faith, let him feel the love of God shed abroad in his heart and controlling his affections, let him see the hope of full salvation, and of future glory streaking the horizon like the dawn of a celestial morning; on this dawn let his eye rest with a full persuasion that the day is breaking, that the sun is there, that it will rise, that it will soon rise, and with this conviction, what will he care for the expiring of the few flickering tapers that surround him? The patience which will best enable men to bear the wrongs, and sorrows, and delays of life, is patient continuance in well-doing, the patient waiting for Christ, the patience which is joint heir of the promises with faith, the patience of hope, which waits for things unseen, looks for the hope of righteousness by faith, and quietly waits for the salvation of the

Lord. Where this exists, the forgiveness of injuries, the endurance of sufferings, the loss of all things, are comparatively easy.

If, then, we would exercise the lower forms of patience, we must do it by securing the possession of the higher. If faith and repentance are unknown to our experience, we must repent and believe before we can expect to bear and forbear even in this world's matters with a truly Christian spirit. If we have repented and believed, we must learn to love and hope, as necessary elements of patience. If we have already studied in this school, and begun to practice its celestial precepts, let us show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Let us wait on the Lord and keep his way. Let us rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Let us hope and quietly wait for his salvation. Let us through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. Let us by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality. If we hope for what we see not, let us with patience wait for it, and ere long we shall see it. We shall see it. Faith shall be turned into sight. The work of patience shall be done forever; and while the patience of the philosophers and worldlings shall be seen in all its hollowness and emptiness, a voice from heaven shall say even of the weakest and unworthiest of us who have thus preserved our souls in patience, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

XVII.

2 Timothy 2, 9.—The word of God is not bound.

This is the language of a prisoner at Rome. The imperial city had seen many a captive brought in singly or to grace the triumph of her conquering chiefs. In comparison with these there was little to attract attention in the case of a Cilician Jew, sent by the Roman prefect of Judea to be tried before the judgment-seat of Cæsar upon charges pertaining to the Jews' religion. To the Romans, such a case was too familiar and too unimportant in itself to excite much interest, especially before the prisoner's actual appearance at the emperor's tribunal. With the exception of a few official functionaries, and of his own brethren, who were numerous in Rome, it is probable that few were aware of his presence or even his existence. It was little imagined by the soldiers whose swords rattled on the ancient pavement of the street where Paul dwelt, or by the vast mixed multitude of citizens in gown or armour, who continually passed before his prison, that within those doors sat one whose influence was to be felt throughout the empire, and beyond its furthest pale, for ages; one who, as well by self-devotion as by divine appointment, was

the Apostle of he Gentiles, the official founder of the Christian church among the nations.

He was now a prisoner, and this his actual condition, bore a significant analogy to some points of his earlier history. In lineage and breeding he was a thorough Jew—a Hebrew of the Hebrews—a Pharisee of the straitest sect—brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, a famous doctor of the law. His attachment to the faith of his fathers was attested by his zeal in opposition to what seemed to threaten it. In the first persecution of the Christians at Jerusalem, he was present, at least as a spectator. The upper garments of those who stoned the protomartyr Stephen, were laid at the feet of Saul of Tarsus. This sight, instead of softening his heart towards the sufferers or rousing his indignation against the persecutors, seems to have kindled in his own breast the flame of an intolerant zeal. Our next view of him is in the service of the persecuting priesthood—making havoc of the church—entering into every house, haling men and women and committing them to prison. A little after he appears again, still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, soliciting employment as their enemy, volunteering his services to the high priest, and demanding letters to the synagogues of foreign cities, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them *bound* unto Jerusalem.

This was known to Christians abroad before he actually came among them, for when Ananias received the divine command to visit him and restore his sight, he expostulated saying, "Lord, I have heard by many

of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem, and here he hath authority from the chief priests to *bind* all that call on thy name." So after he began to preach Christ in the synagogues of Damascus, all that heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent that he might bring them *bound* unto the chief priests?"

The prominence given in this narrative to Paul's eagerness in *binding*, *i. e.* arresting or imprisoning all converts to the new religion, is not an accidental one. It reappears in his own statement of his conversion before the multitude on the castle-stairs in Jerusalem: "I persecuted this way unto the death, *binding* and delivering into prisons both men and women. I went to Damascus to bring them which were there, *bound* unto Jerusalem." And in answer to the Lord's command to go forth—"Lord, they know that I *imprisoned* and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee. And again at Cesarea, before Festus and Agrippa, many of the saints did I shut up in prison." To the circumstance thus marked in his own recollection of his persecuting ministry, it pleased God that there should be something corresponding in his later history as a Christian preacher and confessor. In the catalogue of his sufferings for Christ, one item is in prisons more frequent. When he was bound with thongs upon the castle-stairs, it was but the beginning of this series of captivities, the last of which was terminated only by his martyrdom.

Thus he who once breathed only to bind the followers of Christ, became himself the prisoner of the

Lord, "for whose sake," said he, "I am bound with this chain." How much his own mind was affected by this providential coincidence, is clear from the frequency and point of his allusions to it in his epistles, from the earliest in date, to this to Timothy, in all probability the last of all—"wherein I suffer trouble as an evil-doer *even unto bonds*, BUT THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND," *i. e.*, though I who preach it am a prisoner, the word itself is not confined and cannot be. As he once said in writing to the Roman Christians, "let God be true but every man a liar," so here he seems to say, "let me abide a prisoner forever, if the glorious gospel may but run, have free course and be glorified." This was the prisoner's consolation in captivity—a consolation at once rational and trustful, pregnant with lessons of practical wisdom, some of which it may not be inappropriate or unjustifiable to consider in detail.

1. The first idea suggested by the words in their original connection, is that Paul's incarceration did not hinder his own personal exertions as a preacher of the gospel. His countrymen and others were allowed access to him. Through the wise and tolerant indulgence of the Roman government, he "dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." Though *he* was bound, therefore, the word of God was not—not even as to his personal share in its promulgation.

This was, of course, a precious consolation to the

captive. How much would the pains of his confinement have been aggravated if, in addition to the restraint upon his limbs or his movements, his mouth had been stopped as an ambassador of Christ. How fervently may we suppose that he would then have prayed, and called on others to pray for him, that his mouth might be opened, that utterance might be given him, to speak freely as he ought to speak. But such facility he did possess; and, in the joyful consciousness of this advantage, he here puts the bane and antidote together—Wherein I suffer trouble as an evil-doer even unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound.

The practical lesson taught by Paul's example, in this view of it, is obvious. It is a reproof of our disposition to regard external disadvantages, restraints, and disabilities as either affording an immunity from blame if we neglect to use the power still left us, or discouraging the hope of any good effect from using it. Because we cannot do all that we would, we are too apt to do nothing; or, because we cannot command the means with which we are familiar, we are often ready to abandon the whole enterprise. In this disposition there is more pride than humility. It is tainted with the selfish ambition of a Cesar, who must be all or nothing. It is also condemned by the experience of the world. Some of the greatest achievements in science and the arts, in warfare and in government, in morals and philanthropy, have been effected in the absence of what some men would regard as indispensable appliances, and in a wise contempt of them. It is not the music or the uniform, the burnished metal or the flaunting flag, that secures

the victory, however useful they may be in their own places. Had they been the indispensable conditions of success, the tattered and unshod champions of our own independence must have yielded to the brilliant and well-appointed forces of the enemy. Nay, the very loss or interruption of accustomed comforts and accommodations has been sometimes the not remote occasion of a victory.

It may be so, too, in the spiritual warfare. Men may form the habit of regarding the conventional facilities to which they are accustomed even in benevolent exertion as essential means to the desired end, and when these are withdrawn, may look upon the case as hopeless—as if Paul, when made a prisoner at Rome, had given up all for lost, and ceased to speak or labour for the cause of Christ—as if he had said, I am bound and the gospel is bound with me. It must share my bondage and continue shut up in the walls of my compulsory abode. Such a course would not have been irrational or sinful on the principles which many of us Christians seem to hold; but it was wholly inconsistent with the sentiments and character of Paul. When he could not do all, he still did what he could; he had learned both to abound and to suffer need; he could be all things to all men, that he might save some. When he could not preach Christ as a freeman, he must preach him only the more zealously as an ambassador in bonds. When forced to say, Wherein I suffer trouble as an evil-doer even unto bonds, he could cheerfully and thankfully add, "But the word of God is not bound."

2. It was still true, however, that Paul's bonds di-

minished his efficiency. While he avoided the extreme of abandoning all hope, he equally avoided that of foolishly imagining that he could personally do as much for the diffusion of the Gospel in his own hired house at Rome, as in the wide sweep of his itinerant apostleship. This was impossible, as he well knew; and knowing it, he needed something more to comfort him in his confinement than the consciousness that, though he could no longer do as much as he had once done, he could still do something. This might be enough for him, but it was not enough for the honour of his master. It might satisfy his conscience, but it could not satisfy his heart or appease the cravings of his thirst for the salvation of the world. His work, though not yet at an end, was interrupted, and how should his lack of service be supplied? The answer is a plain one: by the labours of others. This was a large ingredient in the cup of the apostle's consolation. He rejoiced not only in the labours of others during his comparative inaction, but in that inaction as the occasion, the exciting cause, of other men's exertions. Nay, he could even go so far as to consent to be wronged and dishonoured, if by that means his ruling passion might be gratified. To the Macedonian Christians in Philippi he writes as follows from his confinement in the city of the Cesars: "Brethren, I would ye should understand that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold

to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good-will—the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, thinking to add affliction to my bonds, but the others of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice, for I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Christ Jesus, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death; for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

What is the principle involved in this sublime profession of heroic devotion to the cause of Christ? Plainly this, that while Paul was even ready to magnify his office as apostle to the Gentiles, and correctly appreciated both the honour and the difficulty of the work assigned to him, he never dreamed that it was meant to be entirely dependent upon his individual activity. It was not at himself, but at the world, that he continually looked. He regarded his own labours as important only so far and so long as it pleased God to employ them as means to the appointed end; and when they seemed to lose this peculiar relation to the cause, instead of lamenting that his agency was suspended, or dreading the success of any other than his own, he loses sight of his own share in the great work, to look at the great work it-

self, as something dear to him, yet independent of him, which he was willing to promote either by his life or death, as God might please to order, but which he desired to see promoted at all costs and at all hazards, whether by himself, or by his friends, or by his enemies.

This is a spirit worthy of a hero, nay, of an apostle; of one who could and did rejoice that Christ was preached, by whomsoever, and whose highest hope was that Christ might be magnified in him, whether actively or passively, by life or by death. Here too, the lesson to ourselves is obvious. The apostle's example ought to shame us out of all undue reliance upon certain human agencies and influences. Especially ought this to be the case in relation to our *own* share of the work to be performed for the honour of God and the salvation of the world. If Paul, with his apostolic dignity, confirmed by all the signs of an apostle, regarded his own personal exertions only as appointed means with which the sovereign power that prescribed them could as easily dispense, what are we, that we should think ourselves or our assistance necessary to the divine purpose, or that purpose in danger of defeat and disappointment at any momentary interruption of our share in its promotion, or that we should frown upon the emulous exertions of our neighbours in the same cause, as a kind of encroachment upon our prerogative, an insolent intrusion on our chosen and appropriated field of labour? How completely does the spirit of the great apostolic captive put to shame all such exclusiveness and selfish emulation, as displayed too often by the indi-

vidual labourer, and still more by large bodies of such labourers, however zealous and sincere.

This last is but another form of the same error, more insidious, because clothed in the garb of humility. He who professes to distrust, nay, who really distrusts himself as insufficient for this work, may be guilty of an undue reliance upon others, either singly or collectively. However little he may look for from his own individual exertions, he may repose an uncommanded confidence in those of his neighbours, or his leaders, or in the united strength of his party, of his church, or of his nation; and to these corporate bodies may transfer the idolatrous trust and admiration which he dare not arrogate to himself. But this kind of dependence upon human strength for that which God alone can do, though less offensive in its manifestations, is equally at variance with a spirit of true faith, and equally condemned by Paul's example. The principle which actuated and controlled his conduct comprehends in the wide scope of its application all dependence upon human agencies as absolutely or intrinsically necessary to the execution of the divine plan, whether the objects of this misplaced trust be individuals or communities—ourselves or others. The primary meaning of Paul's joyful exclamation is, that though *he* was a prisoner, the word of God was free, but it obviously implies that though *all* the preachers of the word were altogether like him, not even excepting his bonds, it would still have been true, that the word of God was not their fellow captive, but might run and be glorified. Though I and every other human instrument be paralyzed or

shattered, God can perform his own work in his own way; though I and every other messenger endure affliction even unto bonds, *the word of God is not bound*. There is no need, however, of our stopping even here. We are not required to content ourselves with knowing that the word of God is not bound to the hand or foot of any human instrument however eminent, however useful. Let us view the teaching of the text in its uttermost extent, and sound it in its lowest depths, or rather to the depth of our capacity, even though it should conduct us to what may at first sight seem a more abstract and artificial view of the apostle's meaning.

One of the most important lessons couched in this significant expression or deducible from it, would be lost upon us if we went no further. I refer to the doctrine that the truth of God is independent, not only of particular human agents, but of all human systems of opinion, organizations, and methods of procedure. This must be apprehended and believed as a distinct proposition. We may grant the insignificance of any particular personal agency, and yet rely upon the intrinsic efficacy of certain theories and certain plans, whatever be the agency by which they are reduced to practice. As in politics, so in religion, and especially in its active benevolence, the maxim "principles not men" may be delusive, by leading only from one error to another, by withdrawing confidence from personal advantages of character or talent, only to fix it the more blindly on the real or imaginary attributes of systems, schemes, contrivances, and methods. It is important, therefore, that the words of the apostle

should be taken in their widest sense, as intimating that "the word of God is not bound" with this chain any more than with the others. The diffusion and triumph of the truth are not suspended on our methods of promoting them, however excellent. The truth we circulate is not a lifeless, inert mass, which we may shape, and regulate, and bear about at our discretion or caprice; it is a living element, which we can neither generate nor kill, but to which God allows us the honour of furnishing conductors and assigning a direction with a view to certain applications. Whatever reason we may have for cherishing our own accustomed modes of doing this, we must still remember that, in reference to these as well as other things, "the word of God is not bound."

There may seem to be but slight ground or practical necessity for this admonition; but the fact is otherwise. This error is a real and an operative one. Its tendency, if not directly to relax effort, is to weaken faith, discourage hope, damp zeal, contract the views, and thereby most effectually stop the wheels of all great enterprises. The error itself does not lie in the contrivance of ingenious and effectual plans, or in their zealous execution, but in looking upon their operation and results as the aggregate effect produced by saving truth; as if one should suppose that there was no light in the world but that employed in optical experiments, and no electric, or magnetic, or galvanic influence but that subjected to our senses by the pile or battery. It is an honour and a happiness to be allowed to gather up a portion of revealed truth, as the Hebrews gathered manna in their vessels, and

to cast it into certain moulds without destroying its vitality or virtue, and to blend it with other things congenial though distinct, and to clothe it in legitimate though uncommanded forms of our own choosing, and to apply it as we find expedient for our own advantage or for that of others. But we must not let this privilege mislead us into the delusion of imagining that this is all the truth of God can do, or rather that there is no truth at all except as we choose to exhibit or diffuse it; that if our machinery should burst or fall to pieces, it would leave the world to spiritual darkness and starvation. In short, that the word of God is bound to us and to our methods of preserving and diffusing it. In this, as in the other senses heretofore considered, be assured, my hearers, that "the word of God is *not* bound."

The mistaken views, of which I am now speaking, arise from natural and moral causes, some of which are easily detected. Our ideas of value, from their very nature, are connected with our customary modes of measurement and estimation. Whatever we can count or weigh, we own to have a real tangible existence. Whatever we can thus treat to a certain point, even without being able to include the whole, we look upon as vast in its extent or worth, but no less real than if we could measure it by pounds or inches.

But that which cannot be subjected to our measurement at all, we are disposed to reckon as imaginary, or as only half existing, not entitled to a place among the tangible realities by which we are surrounded. The very air we breathe, because it is invisible, is apt to be regarded by the uninstructed

mind, as almost a nonentity; and even when it proves its own existence, when it sweeps over the earth in the tornado, tearing up whole forests, some would rather trace the terrible effect to causes utterly unknown, than to an agent in immediate contact with their bodies, yet apparently beyond the reach of their investigation. It is true that some of these mysterious agencies in nature have been brought to bear with wonderful effect upon the interests of real life. The indomitable light is made to do the slow work of the artist's pencil in a moment of time, and the flitting shadow is arrested in its flight and rendered permanent. An unsubstantial vapour now replaces on the ocean and the land, on the road and in the factory, a vast amount of animal exertion. A power once reckoned too mysterious for scrutiny, or even for belief, now apes the wonder of annihilating time and space, and instantaneously conveys men's whispers not only over continents but under oceans. Effects so real must have real causes, and the world reluctantly admits the fact.

Now, there are triumphs of advancing knowledge in the field of natural discovery—her triumphs over ignorant and stubborn prepossessions. And why may not the truth, though in itself immutable, gain kindred victories in morals and religion? Why should they who no longer venture to dispute the existence and activity of physical causes, which they cannot estimate or measure, still persist in believing that the truth of God is only operative through their channels and in their machinery—that when they have computed the amount of saving knowledge spread through

these, by counting the words, or the pages, or the volumes that contain it, they have stated the sum total of the cleansing, strengthening, illuminating influence exerted by the truth upon this evil world? The doctrine which I would oppose to this delusion is the simple doctrine that "the word of God is not bound" or restricted, in its salutary virtue, to the formal and appreciable power exerted upon churches and Christian communities, or through the ordinary modes and channels of religious influence, however great this power may be, however indispensable to the completion of the work which God is working in our days. We may even admit that it is relatively almost all, but it is still not quite all; and the residuary power may be greater, vastly greater, than it seems to us before attentively considering the other less direct, less formal, less appreciable ways, in which the word of God, the truth revealed in Scripture, is at this moment operating on the condition of society, apart from its constant and direct communication through the pulpit, the school, and the religious press. These are the agencies, indeed, by which sound doctrine is maintained in your churches and impressed upon your youth; and this, in its perfection, is the highest end that can be wrought by the diffusion of the truth.

But let us not forget that much may be effected even when this highest end is not attained. In many a heresy, for instance, how much truth may be mingled, saving it from absolute corruption, and perhaps the souls of those who hold it, from perdition. Infidelity, in all its forms, affects to treat religion with contempt as the offspring of ignorance; but its own

discoveries are mere mutilations of the truths which it has stolen from its despised enemy. The attempt of infidelity to do away with the great doctrines of religion, is the prowess of a dwarf mounting on a giant's shoulders to put out his eye. The best constructed system of unscriptural philosophy, however close and dark, still has its crevices, and through these some light cannot fail to percolate, if only to be seized upon as proof that the system is not one of darkness after all.

The same thing is true as to those slighter and more trivial, but for that very reason more effective forms of unbelief, which are propagated not in philosophical abstractions, but in poetry, romance, and other current literature. The novelist or journalist who, with a scorn of Christianity only to be equalled by his ignorance of what it teaches, undertakes to show his readers "a more excellent way," often brings them at last to some elementary truth, already wrought into the mind and stamped upon the memory of every child who reads the Bible. What a tribute is this to the pervading, penetrating force of truth, that it can find its way even into such dark places, and at least serve to make the darkness visible! Look too at the schemes of civil government and social order framed by irreligious men, or unbelievers in the Scriptures, and observe these two facts easily established: that every departure from the lessons of God's word is a demonstrable evil or defect in relation even to the lower object aimed at; and that every thing conducive to a good end in the system is an adaptation of some Christian doctrine to a special purpose. It is

no doubt far more flattering to the pride of theorists and system-mongers, to regard what they have borrowed or stolen from the Bible as a common stock from which both parties are at liberty to draw; but they have no right, upon this ground, to deny the notorious fact that this pretended common fund was given to the world by revelation ages before their own inventions came into existence.

It would be easy to pursue the same inquiry through every field of science and every walk of art, and to show that even there, the Word of God has first been followed as a guide, and then expelled as an intruder; that its light has first been used to kindle others, and then vain attempts made to extinguish it forever; in a word, that its enemies have first resorted to it in their time of need, and then ungratefully forgotten or unblushingly denied the obligation. In all these cases, it is no doubt true that the result of the mutilating and perverting process is something unscriptural and antichristian. It is not pretended that the few drops of pure water neutralize the poison, or that the single ray of light dispels the darkness into which, as if by accident, it finds its way. The general result may still be evil, although these foreign elements are there; but if they *are* there, who will undertake to say how much less after all the evil is than it would otherwise have been?

Here then is a case in which an inappreciable cause may be known to be producing great effects. The indirect and incidental influence of Bible truth upon erroneous systems of religion, the various forms of infidelity, or science, art, and literature, on man-

ners, government, and social morals, cannot be measured, but it cannot be denied. It may be inscrutable, but it is real, and we must not leave it out of our account when we would estimate the power of divine truth, or our own obligations to diffuse it, or our causes and occasions of encouragement to persevere and look for great results from the diffusion of that light which, though it sheds its full effulgence only on a few most highly favoured spots, at the same time sends some of its rays into the dark places of the earth which are full of the habitations of cruelty. Thanks be to God, that the beneficent effects of his word are not entirely confined to those who willingly receive it, but that even in relation to the church and to Christendom, however vast their advantages above the heathen, "the word of God is not bound."

If this be a correct view of the influence exerted even indirectly by the word of God; if over and above its certain and complete results, it shines through the interstices of unknown caverns, and mitigates the darkness of unfathomed depths; if in fertilizing one spot, it sheds even a few scattered but refreshing drops upon a multitude of others; if in doing all for some, it incidentally does some for all, let me ask, in conclusion, what should be the practical effect of this belief? not that of paralyzing hope or crippling effort, but the very contrary. It should forbid despair; it should excite to new exertion. Its tendency to this effect may be exhibited in three particulars. And first, if all these things be so, we need not tremble for the truth itself. Our efforts to preserve it and improve it may be vain; but it will take

care of itself, or rather God will take care of it. If his word were something that existed only here and there like precious stones and metals, we might fear that it would be drained off to meet some urgent demand elsewhere, or that it might be actually lost or destroyed. But who can fear the loss of that which penetrates all substances, and reaches even the remotest regions? Who can fear the loss of water, air, or fire? To individuals, to families, to entire communities, the truth may indeed be wholly lost, to their eternal undoing. But it shall not be banished from the world. There may be savages to whom the use of fire is unknown. There *are* deserts which are always almost wholly void of moisture. But the flames can never be extinguished on these millions of hearths, or if they were, they would be soon rekindled by the electric clouds of heaven, or the volcanic craters of the earth. The world cannot die of thirst until the windows of heaven are forever stopped, and the fountains of the deep forever emptied. So shall it be with the word of God; he has not only spread it over the surface of society, but given it a lodgment in its innermost recesses. Every system, every institution, every community, has received of its fulness, more or less. Should its regular depositories be destroyed, it will burst forth from its hiding-places where it lay forgotten, to regenerate the world. Its champions may be overcome, its heralds carried captive, "but the word of God is not bound."

Another aspect of the same thing is, that if such be the indirect, as well as the direct effects of truth, there is some hope for the world itself, and even for

those parts of it, and those things in it, which otherwise might seem to be confined to hopeless, irrecoverable ruin. The mass may in itself be wholly corrupt, there may be present in it and diffused through out it a potent antiseptic principle, a salt, not superficially applied, but absorbed into the pores, and lodged in the vessels of the body politic, not so as entirely to purge out its impurities, but so as to preserve it from immediate dissolution. When we hear of wars and revolutions, when we see the weakness of all human safeguards proved experimentally by one convulsion following another, till the cause of human freedom and good government seems desperate, let us remember that amidst the corruptions and infirmities of even the best human institutions, there is still a power working, it may be insensibly, but constantly and not without effect, to procrastinate, if not to prevent forever the catastrophe which sometimes seems so inevitable. The statesman and the demagogue are far from dreaming that what sometimes saves them from the ruin which they had long ceased to think avoidable, is that despised religion which they have in vain endeavoured to exclude from all participation in the honours of their boasted system, but which, in spite of them, has so far leavened it, that even their own suicidal violence fails of its effect. The hand of power may be palsied, or the wild force of the multitude coerced by various accidental causes, but this mysterious principle still lives, and moves, and acts upon society, if not enough to give it health, enough to save its life. The ruler and the ruled may be alike in bondage; "but the word of God is not bound."

Lastly, if this be a correct view of the powerful and multiform energies of truth; of its oblique as well as its direct effects upon the world, it may teach us a valuable lesson as to the true spirit of philanthropy, as being not a formal, rigid, mathematical attempt to save men's souls by certain rules, and in the use of certain ceremonial forms, but a generous, impulsive, and expansive zeal for the glory of God in the salvation of the lost. If such be even the remote and secondary influence of truth upon men's social, intellectual, and moral state, their science, literature, arts, and government, let us give them excess of it, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. And as the surest way of gaining this end, let us flood the world with the pure and unadulterated word of God.

To our several and our separate systems of belief, we owe a diligent use of the necessary means for their establishment and propagation. But to God, to Christ, and to the souls of men, we owe an energetic and unceasing effort to saturate the whole earth with that word in which we all agree. Even when we have done all that seems incumbent on us through the channels of our own ecclesiastical relations, we may still do more through the deep and broad channel of our common Christianity. The word of God has already been repeatedly compared to water, the natural emblem of purification and refreshment. Its diffusion may be likened to the measures for supplying a whole population, such as that of a great city, with this precious element of cleanliness, comfort, health, and safety, great municipal measures now. Other supplies may be acceptable or even indispen-

sable to certain classes or to certain spots, but this is requisite alike to all. To provide it may cost labour, time, skill, and vast expense; but it is worth the price. By some it may be wasted; some may mix it with intoxicating drinks, or use it in other noxious preparations, or directly apply to the injury of others; but in spite of all these possibilities of evil, and a thousand more as easily imagined, it is still a blessing, and may safely be afforded in unlimited abundance. So is it, and so be it, with the word of God. Whatever some may choose to do with it or mix with it, however some may lavish or neglect it or pervert it, it is still the word of God, and in its unadulterated form may be poured upon the nations as a flood, without a fear of either poisoning or drowning them. Then let it gush, and let the world bear witness that though every other channel be obstructed, and every other source of influence exhausted,—though philosophy and fancy be found unavailing,—though prophecies fail, and tongues cease, and all other knowledge vanish away—though the very ministers of truth be fettered in civil or religious bondage, the word of God is not bound—it is not bound; it is free; it is alive; it is in motion; it shall win; it shall have free course and be glorified till "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea."

XVIII.

PSALM 8, 1. 9.—O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

THERE is no traditional and uncommanded usage of the Jews, among the many with which they have overlaid and darkened their own scriptures, half so affecting to the imagination and religious sensibilities as that immemorial suppression of the name Jehovah, which has for ages been a kind of negative or tacit shibboleth, to mark and to perpetuate the difference between Jew and Gentile. However false in principle, however destitute of scriptural foundation and divine authority, it cannot be denied that there is something in this national and everlasting reticency as to the most solemn and significant of all the divine names, not far removed from the sublime, and that even their extreme of superstitious silence, when at all combined with feelings of elevation, is far better than the frivolous levity with which that venerable name is tossed from mouth to mouth, not only in profane discourse, but even in public offices and courts of justice, not to say in the pulpit and the private circles of Christian and religious intercourse.

The want of agreement and congruity between

this singular usage and the characteristic absence of all mysteries and esoteric doctrines in the church of the Old Testament, while it affords a strong presumptive proof that the usage is one foreign from the principles and spirit of the Jews' religion in its purest days, only adds to its imaginative grandeur and effect, by bringing it out in bold relief, like a dark spot on a luminous or shining surface. The religious awe which the suppression was originally meant to indicate, and which has no doubt often since attended it, if right at all, could not have been associated with a more legitimate or worthy object, than that pregnant tetragrammaton, in the four characters of which, as in a sacramental symbol, is wrapped up the germ, or rather the quintessence, of that wonderful preparatory system which excited and sustained the expectation of a Saviour till the time of his epiphany was fully come. However difficult it may be to determine in detail the reason for the use of the two principal divine names by the sacred writers in specific cases, there is no ground for doubt, or for diversity of judgment, as to the main fact, that Jehovah is distinguished, in the Hebrew Scriptures, from all other designations of the Godhead, as the name which attested his peculiar relation to his Church or chosen people, and the clear revelation of himself and of his purposes, vouchsafed exclusively to them; so that the very sound of this word, now supposed by many to be lost through immemorial disuse, or its very sight, when that disuse had grown inveterate, suggested not the vague idea of divinity, nor even that of a personal God, viewed merely in himself and at a distance, but

the warmer feeling of a God in covenant with his people, making himself known to them as he did not to the world at large; nay more, literally dwelling in the midst of them, and actually, personally, reigning over them. With such associations, this significant and pregnant name must soon have grown as different in meaning and effect, from the generic name Elohim, which was common to the true God with all others, as the corresponding terms in modern parlance are from one another; and as all men among us are free to use the name of God, in season or out of season, blasphemously or devoutly, while the name of Lord is for the most part shunned by irreligious lips, as properly belonging to the dialect of personal religion; so the ancient Jews, although they still continued to adore God as the God of all men, under the name Elohim, with more or less of that religious reverence which the name implies, praised him and served him as their own, peculiarly revealed and covenanted God, by the distinctive name Jehovah.

This being the case, it might have been supposed that the distinctive name, thus used to designate the God of revelation and the God of Israel, if significant at all, would have been significant of something closely connected with this singular relation between God and his peculiar people, so that when the name was heard or seen by others or themselves, its very etymology and meaning might suggest ideas of a national or local kind, and irresistibly convey to all minds the conception of a special propriety in Israel on God's part, and in God on theirs. But so far is this from being true, that there is none of the divine names so

remote from such associations, or so little suited in itself to rouse them; none so lofty, or profound, or comprehensive, as an expression of what God is in himself, without regard to the relations which he may sustain to all or any of his creatures, who are recognized in their description only as unlike Him, or contrasted with Him, whom it represents as not only the Supreme, but in a certain sense the only Being, of whom alone existence can in the highest sense be rightfully affirmed; who was when nothing else was; who is what nothing else is; without whom nothing else was, is, or can be; the source of being in all others, the self-existent, independent, and eternal essence, whose most perfect designation of himself was given in that paradoxical but grand enigma, of which the name Jehovah is but an abbreviated symbol—I shall be what I shall be, or I am what I am.

That a name suggestive of all this should be applied to the peculiar relation between God and his people, seems entirely unaccountable, except upon the supposition that it was intended to remind them, by the very name employed to designate their national and covenanted God, that he was not a God distinct from the Creator of the universe, not an inferior and derivative divinity, not even a co-ordinate, co-equal, co-eternal being, but the one, sole, self-existent, independent, and eternal essence, "the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, *who only hath immortality*, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen or can see; to whom be honour and power everlasting, Amen." (1 Tim. 6, 15. 16.)

This precaution against such an error may at first sight seem gratuitous and inconsistent with the very idea of a chosen people; but the whole tenor of the history of Israel shows that such a notion would be perfectly erroneous, and that the native tendency of fallen man to transmute truth into falsehood and pervert the richest blessings into curses, was never more remarkably exemplified than in the national experience of that extraordinary race, who, when they had been severed from the rest of men by a divine choice, for a temporary purpose, and for the ultimate advantage of the whole, strangely imagined that their segregation was designed to be perpetual, and sprang from some intrinsic or innate superiority, or at least had reference to their own exclusive aggrandizement as its final cause and providential purpose. Had this error terminated on themselves, and merely served to aggravate their overweening self-esteem, it would have been comparatively harmless; but alas! the transition was an easy one from false views of themselves to false views of the God whose favour they affected to monopolize as not the God of the Gentiles also; and from this the fatal step was almost unavoidable to the conclusion, that their God was not the God of nature or the universe, but either the antagonistic principle in some monstrous scheme of dualism, or an inferior deity restricted to the Holy Land. When such views became possible, even to the least enlightened Jews, no wonder that the Greek and Roman learned to sneer at the provincial God of Palestine; no wonder that the modern skeptic still delights to represent Him as a local deity; no wonder that the

great apostle had occasion to demand in his day: "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles?" (Rom. 3, 29.)

How far this process of deterioration went, even among the most corrupted of the people, cannot now be ascertained; but it is certain that these false views are never prescribed among the enlightened and believing class, and that they are without the slightest countenance or shadow of authority from the experience or example of the ancient Church, as such, or of the men who were inspired to furnish it with forms and models of devotional experience, some of which are still on record, and contain the clearest exposition of the true sense of the name Jehovah, and of the divine intention, in revealing it, to hinder the indulgence of a grovelling nationality and sectarian bigotry, even under institutions in themselves so capable of breeding it; or if it could not be prevented, to condemn it and expose it by means of the perpetual contradiction between such a spirit and the very name by which they were accustomed to invoke God, as the God of their fathers, and the God in covenant with themselves. Throughout the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, the uniform tendency of revelation, and of the spirit which the ancient saints imbibed from it, is to identify the God of the Jews with the God of the Gentiles, the God of revelation with the God of nature, and the God of nature with the God of grace; to say, O Lord, our Lord, our King, our national, our covenant God! how glorious is thy name, the revelation of thy nature, not only among us, but in all the earth!

Nor was this effect suffered to depend upon the dictates of reason or of conscience; much less was it left to the discretion or caprice of the collective church or individual believers. It was forced, as it were, upon the very senses, which could not refuse to recognize the name of God inscribed upon the frame of nature, as the human architect or sculptor leaves his own indelibly impressed upon the incorruptible and almost unchangeable material upon which his skill and genius work their wonders. It is the doctrine, not of poetry or mere æsthetics, but of Scripture, that the heavens are telling the glory of God, that the perpetual interchange of light and darkness furnishes a long unbroken series of witnesses for Him—day unto day poureth out speech, night unto night imparteth knowledge; that the absence of articulate expression only adds to the sublime strength of this testimony—no speech, no words, not at all is their voice heard, and yet their voice is gone out into all the world, and their words unto the end of it; that the whole frame of nature is instinct and vocal with the praises of another than itself; that throughout the majestic temple of the universe, all of it says Glory—not its own, but God's—whose name, Jehovah, is distinctly legible all over the stupendous structure, and whose glory is placed upon and above the very heavens. The instinctive adoration of that glory is not limited to men of science and cultivation; it is felt by the most ignorant and uninformed; it is felt by the savage as he eyes the heavens from his forest or his desert; it is felt by the young children whose intelligence is still but partially developed, but whose wonderful struc-

ture and mysterious progress do not more truly bear a passive testimony to the glory of their Maker, than their unconscious admiration actually contributes to the same end, affording a strong defence against the unbeliever who would question God's holiness or obscure his glory; so that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he has ordained strength to silence even his most spiteful enemies.

To all this, the very name Jehovah should have led the least enlightened of the Jews, as it did to all this lead the most enlightened, who were wont to read that sacred name not only in the volumes of their law, and on the high priest's forehead, but on every thing; so that, to their believing eyes, the very bells of the horses were, as if in anticipation of the prophecy, inscribed already, Holiness to Jehovah. As in God's palace, all says glory, all its contents and inmates, so did they among the rest. Some of the noblest of the Psalms of David, those in which even an irreligious taste can see most to admire, were written for the very purpose of identifying the Jehovah of the Scriptures with the God of Nature. Of this, the nineteenth and the twenty-ninth, besides the psalm before us, are remarkable examples. The sublime description, which has been already quoted, of the heavens as witnesses for God, is merely introductory to a description of this same God as the author of a still more glorious law; and in the other case referred to, the God whose mighty and majestic voice the Psalmist hears upon the waters, and sees crushing the cedars of Lebanon, heaving out flames of fire, shaking the wilderness, and stripping forests—the God whom he sees riding on

the flood and enthroned as king forever, is not, as the infidel pretends, a faint copy of the cloud-compelling Zeus or the Thunder-god of Scandinavian mythology, but a God who must be worshipped in the beauty of holiness—the Lord Jehovah, who gives strength unto his people, who blesses his people with peace.

With these views of his physical supremacy, as well as of his moral perfection, the inspired poets of the old economy, and those for whom their compositions furnished vehicles of pious sentiment, were not unwilling to look nature in the face, or afraid to look up from the ground on which they trod, at the magnificent creation overhead and all around, as if it were the devil's handy-work, or that of some inferior god, or that of fallen man, and, therefore, necessarily contaminating to the eyes and ears of saints; but in that very character of saints or holy ones, and in the exercise of those affections which determined them to be such, they looked nature in the face, not by chance, but of set purpose; not by compulsion, but spontaneously; not rarely, but often; not as an occasional indulgence, but as an habitual duty; not with a gaze of vacant listlessness, but with a serious contemplation, they considered, they attentively considered the heavens; yet with no idolatrous and overweening reverence, as if self-made; with no atheistical indifference, as if not made at all; but with a genuine, devout, believing interest, as knowing them to be the handy-work of God—not the gross product of a blind and brutal power, acting irresistibly, yet wholly without purpose, but the perfect and symmetrical result of a divine intelligence, as really designing and construct-

ing what it brings into existence, as the mind of man directs his fingers in the nicest operations of mechanical contrivance or artistic skill; so that the psalmist, by a bold and beautiful assimilation of the finite to the infinite, describes the heavens as the work of God's fingers—a work not abandoned to its own control, or left without control, when once created, but ordained, fixed, settled, by the same creative and almighty power, each celestial body in its own allotted sphere or orbit; so that when he considered the heavens the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he had ordained—he looked through the contrivance to the great contriver—through the building, in which all says "glory"! to the builder, by whose skill and power, and for whose everlasting praise it is and was created.

Such religious views of the material universe must, of necessity, react on the spectator, to whom the works of God perform the office, not only of a telescope, but of a mirror, *through* which he sees God, *in* which he sees himself; and, as some celestial phenomena can only be observed by the assistance of reflectors, so in morals, man can only see himself in God, and never becomes conscious of his littleness until it is reflected from God's greatness. Hence the atheist must be proud, because his standard is so low, because he substitutes for God, in his comparison of magnitudes, not only man but self, not only an inferior species, but the individual example of that species, as to which he knows, or ought to know, most evil, while the true believer in a God employs a very different measure, and sees his own diminutive proportions

constantly reflected from the glass of God's majestic works above him and around him, he can say, with David, When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou shouldst think of him, or thinking of him, shouldst remember him or bear in mind so insignificant an object—not as implying any serious doubt as to the fact; for if there is a providence at all, it must be a particular one. Nor does the difficulty of the subject turn upon the greatness or smallness of the objects comprehended in its scope, but on its being exercised at all; and if it is, as we are well assured, and if, without it, not a hair falls or a sparrow dies, how much more may man expect to share in this divine protection, the reality of which is not denied or even called in question by the Psalmist, who is not laying down a proposition or establishing a doctrine, but expressing a strong feeling, namely, that of conscious insignificance before God, under the sense of which he wonders, not whether God thinks, but that he should think of an object so diminutive; or having once thought, should remember; or remembering, should visit man, considered as a race, or any son of man in particular. Whether the reference be to figurative visitations, such as men are hourly receiving, or to those more sensible theophanies, appearances of God in human or angelic form, by which the saints of the Old Testament were sometimes honoured, when about to be called to some extraordinary duty, or distinguished by some signal mercy. What is man that God should thus remember him, or the son of man that God, in either of the

senses just explained, should visit him? This feeling of surprise, though always reasonable and becoming, never seems so natural as when it is immediately suggested by the sight of God's stupendous works, especially the heavens, which are the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained.

It is not, however, before these material works themselves that man is called to bow with such a deep conviction of his own inferiority. Matter is no more above mind upon a large scale than a small one, in an earth than in a clod, in a sea than in a drop, in a sun than in a spark, in a world than in an atom. The least mind is superior, in itself and in the scale of existence, to all matter. Man is not bound to recognize either the heavens or the heavenly hosts as his superiors. His homage is due, not to them but to their maker. He stands in speechless admiration of them, only as stupendous proofs of God's existence and perfections. In themselves considered, they are man's inferiors; he looks down upon them, nay, he exercises a dominion over them, and that not by chance or usurpation, but express divine authority. For strange as it might seem that he who made and manages those shining worlds, in all their complicated systems, should remember man and visit him in favour, it is true, for God made man in his own image, and invested him with power as his own vicegerent, with dominion over the inferior creation, so that even sun, and moon, and stars, and elements, and seasons, should contribute to his wealth and his enjoyment, and the earth from which he was originally taken be compelled to yield her fruits for his subsistence, and

the most mysterious powers of nature made to minister to his convenience; and besides this strange subjection of inanimate creation to his interest and his will, the lower animals are pressed into his service, even those whose strength is far superior to his own, and who might well seem able to shake off his yoke at any moment, and yet bear it with submission, not as a necessary consequence of reason upon his part, —for the highest animal sagacity brings with it no such relative superiority among the brutes themselves— but as a relic and a proof of man's original formation in God's image and his original vestiture with delegated power as God's vicegerent over the material and irrational creation, in admiring retrospect of which the Psalmist says: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou didst put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."

Even this honour put on man as an intelligent and spiritual being, partaking, in this cardinal respect, of God's own nature, although infinitely less, might seem sufficient of itself to justify the bold assertion, "thou has made him a little lower than the angels," or, as the words literally mean, "hast made him to lack little of divinity," so richly hast thou crowned his head with glory and honour. But the full justification of this bold description is afforded by another fact, as to the most essential and conspicuous feature of that image in which man was created—his moral similarity of nature and uniformity of will to God--

coincidence of judgment, disposition, and affection; in a word, true holiness, the crowning excellence of God himself, without which his created image must have been a sightless mask, a lifeless statue, or a living but soulless form, but with which man was really invested, and possessing which he may, without irreverence or extravagance, be said to have been "made a little lower," not "than angels" merely, but than God himself, from whom he differed only, although infinitely, in degree.

But although Adam might have triumphed in this glorious and blessed likeness, how can we, or how could even he, who was the man after God's own heart, but who so often and so bitterly bewails his own corruption, as one conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, whose only hope was in the mercy of the God against whom he had sinned, through what illusive medium could even he behold himself or the race of which he was a member, as still holding this sublime position, as little lower than the angels, nay, as lacking little of divinity? If he, if men in general, had lost their chief resemblance to their maker; if the image in which they were made at first had been defaced and broken, and their mutual communion turned into estrangement, and the prospect of perpetual favour bantered for a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, how could David wonder at the honour and glory with which man was crowned, instead of standing horrorstruck to see it torn from his dishonoured brow? Was it because he did not know or had forgotten this great fact in human history? Alas, his psalms are full of it. Was it in

musing recollection of a state of things now past and never to return? But such a glowing exhibition of a happiness and greatness irrevocably lost, would be unnatural, irrational, and as such, inconsistent with his character whether intellectual or moral.

Nor are these unworthy suppositions needed to explain his language, which receives its full solution from the fact that he contemplates man, both in the future and the past, as fallen and raised again, as cast off and restored, as lost in Adam and as saved in Christ, not only reinstated, but exalted higher; for the first Adam was indeed a living soul, but the last Adam is a quickening spirit; the first man is of the earth earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven. Yet as the offence, so also is the free gift, for if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Without this link the chain is broken; without this simultaneous view of man as he was and is to be, of the first and second Adam, there is something wanting in the Psalm itself, a flaw, an incongruity, a contradiction between revelation and experience, which can only be removed by looking down as well as up the stream of time, forward to Christ as well as backwards to Adam. It is therefore no fanciful accommodation, but a true and necessary exposition of the Psalmist's meaning, when the apostle, after quoting these words, speaks of Jesus as made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he by the grace of God might taste death for every man, and thereby reinstate us in our pristine

exaltation, renewed in the spirit of our minds and clothed upon with that new man, which is created after the likeness of God, in knowledge, and righteousness, and true holiness. (Ephesians 4, 24; Colossians 3, 10.)

Not only as a model or example does the second Adam thus restore the race of which he has become the head by his assumption of its nature, so that in him as their representative they see themselves again exalted, but by actual union with him, they experience a real and substantial exaltation from the depths of sin and misery to a state of justification through his righteousness and sanctification by the power of his Spirit, and a consequent participation in the elevating and ennobling process by which he has raised humanity from being almost lower than the brutes, to be again a little lower than the angels, than divinity, than God himself. How much of all this David clearly saw, we can no more determine than we can look back at noon and tell how much of what we then see bathed in light was visible at sunrise or at daybreak; but we do know that the Saviour whom he saw and whom we see, however great the difference of clearness, is the same, just as we know that the skies which are now telling the glory of God, and the starry firmament which now shows forth his handy-work, are literally and truly the same objects of which David said, "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou shouldst remember him, or the son of man that thou shouldst visit him and make him lack but little of divinity,

and crown him with glory and honour, and make him have dominion over the works of thy hands, and put all things under his feet." In Christ as the Head, and in his people as the Body, this is gloriously fulfilled, "for he hath put all things under his feet," (1 Cor. 15, 27,) and given him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1, 22. 23.) In prophetic foresight of the Saviour the inspired king could say, and in believing recollection of him *we* can say, of man not only as he was before the fall, but as he is, already fallen, yet susceptible of restoration to God's image and to the dignity inseparable from it, thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

The train of thought which we have been pursuing, is not only in accordance with the general tenor of the word of God, but identical with that which runs through the psalm before us, as expounded and applied in the New Testament, and may be profitably used by us for the correction of some common and pernicious errors. It may serve, for example, as a corrective of that spurious and vitiated taste which many cherish for the beauties of nature, and which sometimes verges towards the worst form of idolatry. It is true, the views which we have taken are equally adverse to the opposite extreme of sanctimonious indifference or fanatical contempt for the material works of God; to both these forms of error they afford the only safe and efficacious antidote, by teaching us to "consider the heavens" as "the work of God's fingers," "the moon and the stars" as things which

he has "ordained," and to derive from the view of his perfections thus suggested, new impressions of our own insignificance and his benignant condescension in originally placing man above this glorious creation and again restoring him when he had fallen. A habitual contemplation of this aspect of God's works would be the best corrective, both of the spurious religion which ignores them, and of the atheism which beautifies or the pantheism which deifies external nature.

Nor would this corrective influence be limited to the domain of sentiment or taste; it might extend to science, and restore a healthful circulation in the otherwise inanimate and soulless frame of mere material wisdom, from astronomy, whose chosen work it is to "consider the heavens the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained;" to zoology, which pries into the habits and the constitution of the animal creation; "all sheep and oxen, yea, and beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea."

But why should I speak of this ameliorating process as one merely possible, when it is really a matter of experience; when the cases of eminent investigators and discoverers who believe in God and Christ, and who apply to the connection between physical and moral truth the maxim, what God hath joined together let not man put asunder, are no longer rare exceptions to the general rule of sneering skepticism or dogmatizing unbelief, but bid fair, in our own day and country, to reverse the old relation between faith and

infidelity in scientific studies, by affording in their own example the most striking and conclusive proof that ignorance of God or hatred to him is by no means a prerequisite to thorough knowledge, and correct appreciation of his works. When the change, thus auspiciously begun, shall be completed, we may hope to see it followed by another in the feelings and the dialect of common life, as to the dignity of human nature, a cessation of that strong delusion which leads men to shut their eyes upon the most notorious fact in human history, the fact of man's apostasy from God, and with impotent energy try to struggle back to their original position by their own unaided strength, speaking and acting just as if the fall and its effects were a mere phantasma and a hideous dream, from which the world was now awaking, when in fact the dream and the illusion are all the other way, and whoever is awakened from them, must awake to the discovery, however humbling and unwelcome, that man, though once exalted, is now fallen, and can only be restored by sovereign mercy, as offered and exercised through Jesus Christ. The soul, once roused from its protracted stupor, may distinctly read this truth by looking inwards at the ruins and remains of man's original condition, at his present degradation and pollution, and at the aspirations after something better which disturb him even in his deepest slumbers and his worst excesses.

The same thing, if he looks out of himself, is legible not only in the word, but in the works of God, or rather in the word and works of God together, in his works as expounded by his word and Spirit. How-

ever blank or dark the universe may seem till thus illuminated, when the light does shine upon it, the reawakened soul can no longer "consider the heavens the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained," without inquiring, "what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou shouldst visit him, and make him want but little of angelic, nay, of godlike exaltation, crowned with glory and honour, and invested with dominion over the irrational creation!"

This conception of man's pristine elevation sometimes rises before the mind's eye, as a beautiful and splendid image of unfallen humanity, standing like a statue upon some triumphal arch or commemorative column, or suspended in mid-air like some celestial visitant surveying with compassion this inferior world. But as we gaze upon it, and indulge the fond imagination that the relative position of the race and of the individual man is still enchanted, the light of revelation and experience grows brighter, and as it reaches its extreme degree, the image vanishes away, as if absorbed in the intense light, and the lofty place so proudly occupied by man, is seen to be a blank, a vacuum, an empty space, through and beyond which may be seen the pure effulgence of the divine perfections, "unobscured, unsullied by a cloud or spot, though man is fallen, fallen from his high estate." And as the eye of the spectator shrinks from this unveiled, dazzling brightness, it is suddenly relieved by an intervening object, at first undefined and dubious, like a radiant cloud or mist, which by degrees assumes a shape and a distinguishable outline,

till at length it can no longer be mistaken, as a human form, a man, the Son of man, but, oh, how changed, how transfigured before us! his face shines as the sun! his raiment is white as the light! and from the bright cloud overshadowing him, a voice comes forth out of the excellent glory, saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." It is indeed the Son of God, it is indeed the Son of man, the type of our humanity restored and glorified. Oh if this blessed sight could be associated, even in imagination, with our daily contemplations of the face of nature; if we could not look upon the heavens the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained, without remembering what man once was, what he now is, and above all what he yet may be; we might find not only pleasure in prosperity, but solace under sorrow, in contemplating the works of God, not as poets, or artists, or philosophers, or atheists, but as Christians, whose perspicacious faith cannot rest in what is visible, but pierces through the thin material veil in search of hope and consolation, just as Stephen, on the very verge of martyrdom, and from the very midst of his judicial murderers, "looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of the Father." Yes, there is a sense in which even we might have a right to say as he did, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." And though the blinded world around us might cry out with a loud voice, and stop their ears, and run upon us with one accord, even they might be compelled to take

knowledge of us as having been with Jesus, even they, if they looked steadfastly upon us, might see the face of every one among us beaming with unearthly radiance, as if it were the face of an angel.

Having reached this point in our experience, having thus learned to associate the material works of God with the profoundest views of spiritual truth, we should need no further remedy for that grovelling nationality or party spirit, which is apt to spring up even in renewed hearts and enlightened minds, not only in spite, but in consequence of those very privileges which ought to have forbidden its existence, just as the Jews learned to associate their most narrow and uncharitable prejudices with that very name of God—which ought to have reminded them, at every moment, that Jehovah, though in covenant with them, was not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. If we would shun the kindred, but more odious error of degrading the God whom we worship, and the Christ in whom we trust, to the level of a local chief or party leader, let us here learn to identify the object of our faith and adoration with the God of creation and of providence; let us not only read the name of God our king, and God our Saviour, traced in characters of light upon the whole material universe, but strive to make it legible to others also, till the book of nature and the book of revelation are enveloped in one vast illumination, in the blaze of which all lesser lights are lost, and in the midst of which all human tongues of man shall be heard in harmony or unison, responding to the loud but speechless testimony of the heavens, "Oh Lord, our Lord, how glorious is thy name in all the earth!"

XIX.

John 17, 3.—This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

It is a glorious doctrine that there is a God. We are forced to assume it, as a first principle of our religious knowledge, and perhaps for that very reason, are prone to underrate or to forget its value. To correct this practical error, we need only ask ourselves, what should we be without a knowledge of this great truth? Men may dispute as to the mode in which our first conceptions of a God have been obtained. Some may derive it from an observation of his works, and subsequent reflection on them. Some may regard it as innate; a kind of invisible writing on the soul, to be educed and rendered legible by intellectual and moral culture. But this much appears certain: we can form a conception of a rational soul without any definite notions of God, even of *a* God, of any God.

We can conceive of such a soul with its ideas restricted to itself, or to beings like itself, with no higher standard or more perfect model than that afforded by its own experience, or its observation of its fellows.

Or if we suppose it to rise higher, as imagining one like itself, but differing in degree; conceiving only of itself exalted to a higher rank, but with no conception of a lawgiver, a sovereign, an almighty deliverer. Such a mind would be truly dark, compared with the light which blazes around us.

But suppose a portion of that light to be let in upon it by degrees, and with it a conception of something intrinsically higher, better, nobler than the man himself, distinguished from him not merely by an individual or even a specific, but by a generic difference, possessing all that appears good in us, but without the limitations and defects which mar it; possessing more of knowledge, power, and goodness, much more, vastly more, infinitely more. This is a great advance upon his previous conceptions, this is the idea of a God, however vague and immature; it is a new and grand idea, it presents a new aim and a higher standard, something to which the awakened soul can now look up, and towards which it can stretch in emulous desire to rise above itself. Even by removing all limitation, and by raising every excellence to the highest pitch conceivable, we come to the idea of perfection, at least negatively; and this, if not all that is attainable, is certainly a great advance from nothing or from self to God, to the notion of a perfect object for our contemplation, our desire, our love.

But this idea of perfection may itself be imperfect. The mind may leave out of view some essential attributes, or view them in a false light and in disproportion. It may even view them as abstractions not

inherent in a personal subject, inherent only in the universe, or in its parts, or in the powers of nature, or in deified men, or in lower animals, or in artificial idols. This is heathenism in its various gradations. But even where these grosser errors are avoided or escaped, the view may be confined to what the older theologians called the natural attributes of God, to the exclusion of the moral. The power, wisdom, omnipresence, and omniscience of the deity may be contemplated alone. Increase the light so far as to afford a glimpse of his truth, justice, holiness, benevolence, and mercy. What an advance is this upon the previous conception, even of an allwise and almighty being! It is scarcely less than that before described!

But even among the moral attributes of deity so called, some may be acknowledged to the exclusion of the rest. He may seem all mercy and no justice, giving license to transgression; or all justice and no mercy, driving the guilty to despair. So too with his natural perfections; his wisdom may be exalted at the cost of his omnipotence, a wisdom utterly unable to effect its own designs; or his power may appear divorced from wisdom, a blind, unintelligent brute force. All these varieties of error are not only possible, but have been really exemplified in systems of religion and philosophy, and in the tentative inquiries of the individual speculator on the mode of the divine existence. But let these discordant views be brought into harmony and due proportion, as the light of day reduces objects magnified and distorted by the dubious twilight, and how astonishing the change! It is like a new revelation. What before appeared in

conflict now harmoniously co-operates; things which seemed contradictory, illustrate one another. This is indeed perfection. What was seen before was but a name, this is the reality; that was *called* a perfect being, but this *is* one; that was the vague conception of *a* God, this is *the* God, this the *true* God.

But even here experience proves that men may cling to the idea of plurality, as something at least possible. Why may there not be many perfect beings? The very question implies some defect in the idea of perfection. That supreme perfection in one being must exclude it in all others, is a higher refinement to which even wise men have not always attained. Hence the doctrine of the divine unity; of monotheism as opposed both to polytheism and to pantheism, is a further advance upon the steps which we suppose to have been already taken in the ideal progress of a soul from total ignorance of God towards just and clear conceptions of his nature. That the unity of the divine nature stands nearer to the end than the beginning of this progress, is apparent from the fact, that in proportion as the unassisted powers of the human mind have risen to more just views of the deity, the number of the beings in whom it was supposed to reside has always been diminished, sometimes from many thousands to a few hundreds, then to scores and tens, until it has reached two, where many, with the Gnostics and the Manichees, and other dualists have stuck fast, unable to account for the existence of evil, except upon the supposition of two co-eternal but antagonistic principles. When this last difficulty has been vanquished, and the one-

ness of the Godhead seen to be essential to his absolute perfection, men have sometimes stood still in amazement at their own delay in reaching a conclusion which now seems to them not only obvious but unavoidable. And if we may suppose a single mind to have been brought through all these stages of conviction and illumination, and to look back from the last through those by which it was preceded, to the distant starting-point of its ascent, it is easy to conceive of the astonishment with which such an inquirer would survey the vast strides by which he had passed from darkness to twilight, from twilight to the dawn, and from the dawn to the meridian blaze of clearly revealed truth—from no god to a god, from a god to the god, the first to whom there is no second, the whole in whom there are no parts, "the only true God."

I say this is a glorious doctrine. It is a glorious thing to know the true God, even in the lowest sense; to know that he exists, to see the proofs, to feel the necessity of his existence. Even in this, supposing it to be possessed alone, there would be something elevating and enlarging in the capacity to frame such a conception of the true God, even as remote, even as an object of mere speculative contemplation. How much more to feel his influence! If it is a privilege and honour to behold, by the artificial aid of glasses, those heavenly bodies which directly and sensibly affect us least, how must we feel towards those which are revealed to the unassisted eye, if free from all obstruction and disease, and whose effects are matters of perpetual experience? So, too, the soul, when once brought to contemplate God, the only true God, feels

a desire, or at least a need of some more intimate relation to him. Not contented with his light, it craves his heat, or in its absence, feels itself to be forever cold and dead. Under this impression, in obedience to the law of our original constitution, many a great but half-enlightened mind has yearned after intimate communion with that God whom it has learned to contemplate, with an eye of speculative reason, as possessed of all conceivable perfection. But this instinctive movement is repressed by new discoveries, disclosing the necessity of further and still clearer revelations of the object which appeared to be completely unveiled to the eye of the spectator.

I have supposed the inquirer, in the process which has been described, to set out from himself, and by removing all that seems imperfect and corrupt, and indefinitely magnifying all that we regard as good in his own constitution, to arrive at last at the conception of a God. From the very nature of this process, it involves comparison at every step, between God and himself. And this comparison inevitably carries with it a conviction of inferiority, a sense of insignificance and meanness. This could not fail to arise, even from the contemplation of God's natural perfections, his power and his wisdom, as contrasted with the ignorance and weakness of his creatures. No wonder that it should be so, when God and he are at the opposite extremities of the scale, through which he has been passing in his quest of infinite perfection. In proportion as his views of God have risen higher, must his views of himself have become more humbling, even in reference to natural qualities.

But he cannot confine his view to these. If really enlightened as to the divine nature, he must see that its moral perfections are not only real but essential, and that these must be taken into the account in measuring the interval between himself and God. This new and more complete comparison invariably produces a deep sense not only of physical inferiority, but of moral uncongeniality. The more correct his notion of God, the more clearly must he see that holiness is necessarily included in it, and the more distinct his view of that holiness, the more vivid and painful the sense of his own sinfulness, because it essentially consists in opposition to that holiness of God which he now sees so clearly. This is in fact necessary to a just view of the divine nature on the part of fallen creatures. Where there is no sense of sin, there is no apppreciation of God's holiness.

This is to fallen man the natural order of his thoughts and his discoveries. We do not first see God, and then by contrast with his holiness, discover what sin is. It might be so with other beings, or with man before his fall, but it is not so with us. It is the gnawing sense of guilt that leads men to their first discoveries of God in the perfection of his nature. The reproofs of conscience presuppose a law, discriminating between right and wrong; and such a law presupposes a lawgiver. It is not before a mere abstraction that man trembles, but before a personal avenger. While the conscience still remains insensible, the proofs of God's existence may make slight impressions on the understanding. But when conscience is aroused, and man confesses to himself, if not to

others, that he is a sinner, his thoughts are irresistibly borne onward to the bar at which he is to be arraigned, to the judgment-seat and him who sits upon it.

This indivisible connection between conscience and the being of a God is far beyond the reach of sophistry; this witness cannot be silenced or gainsayed, and if its testimony be for a time suppressed or disregarded, it will yet speak out, in shrieks or whispers, in some emergency of life, upon the death-bed, or in hell, bringing home the irresistible conviction that there is a just and holy God, against whom we have sinned, and from whom we are to receive our everlasting portion. It is the want of this convincing evidence, at least in any adequate degree, that dims the clearest speculations of the heathen sages. Because they had no due sense of sin, they had and could have no correct conception of that God against whom all sin is committed, and to whose very nature, no less than his will, it is essentially opposed. Hence too the wisest of the heathen, those who approached nearest to the Scriptures in their views of the divine perfections, are precisely those who seem to have had the most definite, experimental sense of sin. The same thing is exemplified in Christian errorists. The further they recede from deep and thorough views of sin, the more they are disposed to extenuate it, the more jejune do they become in their conceptions of the divine nature, till in many cases God becomes to them a name, an idea, an abstraction, a nonentity.

On the other hand, the clearer the conception of God's holiness, the deeper the conviction of man's

vileness; so that nothing more contributes to this deep humiliation than enlarging views of the divine perfection, forcing the self-convicted sinner to exclaim with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes!"

And this sense of vileness cannot be separated from an apprehension of God's wrath, and a desire to escape it. The man can no longer be contented with a scientific contemplation of the deity; he feels his alienation, and his need of reconciliation, and he asks, can God communicate with fallen creatures? will his holiness admit of it? his justice suffer it? And if he can thus condescend to deal with sinners, will he? has he done so? has he ever sent a message to man since the fall? The knowledge that he can renew the intercourse without a violation of his attributes is blessed knowledge that he will; still more so that he has already actually done it is a glorious revelation, prompting the earnest, passionate inquiry, when, where, how? what has he sent? whom has he sent?

The answer to this question brings us on still further in our search for God. He has sent us a message in his word, indited by his Spirit, a written revelation, perfectly consonant with that in nature, but transcending it, and going far beyond it; so that one of these great volumes serves to illustrate and expound the other. When we open this new volume, it is to meet a new disclosure. He has not only sent a message, but a messenger—a living representative, a personal ambassador. He has sent not only his own Spirit in his word and in the hearts of men, but

his own Son, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person—not a created representative, but God manifest in the flesh, the great mystery of godliness, or of the Godhead, the unity of persons in that one divine essence—a secret hidden from philosophers, and held back even from the chosen people, or imperfectly disclosed to them in types and symbols, perhaps to save them from polytheism until they were established in the doctrine of God's unity, but now brought to light in the gospel, a new and glorious light, transcending all our previous discoveries—three persons and one God—the Son and the Spirit the revealers of the Father, sent by him for this very purpose, the Spirit in his word and in the hearts of his people; but his mission is dependent upon that of the Son, who comes in human flesh to reveal the Father, to instruct, to conquer, to atone—first as the angel of the covenant, then as the Messiah, the anointed—as a prophet to instruct, as a king to conquer, as a priest to expiate, as a Saviour to redeem—the Christ—Jesus—both together Jesus Christ—the anointed Saviour, the Son of God and the Son of man—God and sent of God—man and sent to man. This is indeed the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. What a privilege to know this Saviour, not apart from God or independently of him, but as essentially one with him. None knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son revealeth him. We cannot know God without him. He is the great revealer of the Father—his Word, his Wisdom. Our notions, which might else be too abstract, are embodied and realized in him. Even in theory, our

views of God are too vague without Christ, and unless taken through him. But there is still another and a far stronger reason why we must come to God through him. God is holy, and we are sinners. As an absolute sovereign, as a righteous judge, he is forever inaccessible. Our God is a consuming fire, to which no man can approach and live. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. We may come to God through him, not only as a man but as a Saviour. It is through this new and living way that we may venture to approach. God brings us near to himself through the blood of the everlasting covenant. There is forgiveness with him that he may be feared. We are forgiven that we may know him.

It is only thus that we can know him, and that not speculatively but experimentally. We may know him as a merciful and sin-pardoning God. We may know him as ours by faith and a self-appropriating knowledge. In our own happy experience we may know, not only that he is, but that he is a rewarder of those diligently seeking him. We may know him as a child knows its parent, with a knowledge which cannot be mistaken, or confound its object with another—a knowledge necessarily including trust, esteem, and intimate communion. To know God is to love him. All alienation here implies some defect of knowledge. To know God in Christ is to know him as a Saviour, and to trust in him as such. To know him is to know his Holy Spirit, and to seek his influences, and to have them. All this is really included in the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

Now this experimental knowledge of the highest good, when imparted to a lost and ruined world, is life. Look abroad upon the valley of dry bones by which you are surrounded,—see all the elements of our moral constitution dislocated, decomposed, dissolved,—a wide-spread scene of confusion and corruption, in which matter and form may still be recognized. But life is wanting—all is dead. Philosophy has lavished its experiments upon it for a course of ages, but with no effect, except to aggravate the ghastliness of death by occasional spasms of apparent life. To this scene of mournful desolation and decay introduce the knowledge of God, the true God, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. This is precisely what was wanting—it is life; it is life from the dead: the effect is instantaneous and electric; the graves of humanity are opened; see, it bursts its cerements and comes forth in a blessed resurrection, alive to God, to holiness, to happiness; the paralyzed faculties begin to move; the affections are restored to their forsaken objects; the harmony and balance of the powers is reinstated; darkness is turned to light, weakness to strength, death to life; old things are passed away, all things are become new.

But what if this new life, all glorious as it is, should prove to be but transient, evanescent, like a pleasing dream? But see, it stretches out into the future, and as it advances, all checks are removed. It swells, it grows; life from the dead is followed by no new vicissitude: man lives to die no more. We may look for decay and retrocession, but it comes not.

God is unchangeable, so is the new relation of the soul to him; it cannot fail until the mercy of the Father and the merit of the Son, and the influences of the Spirit are exhausted; it is a new creation; it is a new world; and the life, instead of failing, grows more real and abundant till it reaches the verge of this world, and launches forth into a new state of existence, but not there to die; it lives in those waters of eternal being, buffets the waves of that shoreless ocean, rises and falls upon their crests, and by them is borne on and on beyond our view. It is forever. Yes, it is forever. Yes, this new life is eternal. Well might the great High Priest of our profession, in his sacerdotal prayer, say of his followers and of all who should believe upon him through their word—"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

To be ignorant of all this is a terrible condition; but there is another still more fearful, I mean that of knowing it but only as a speculative truth. Yes, the thickest darkness of the heathen mind in reference to these great truths, though more degrading in itself, and in its present effects, is less appalling in its influence on character and destiny, than barren, unavailing, unbelieving knowledge. Why? because opposition or indifference to the truth is never a mere intellectual deficiency or error, but invariably the fruit of moral dispositions. The ear which will not hear when God speaks, and the eye which cannot see with all the light which he affords, are sins of a corrupted and hard heart; and he who finds himself in

this position, instead of pitying the blindness of the heathen and the doom to which it is conducting them, may almost envy their superior chance of clemency at God's bar, in comparison with those who know and even boast of knowing who he is and what he has already done for man's salvation, and yet proudly say by every action of their lives that they will not be saved in this way, or rather that they need not to be saved at all. For this, disguise it as you will, my hearer, is the genuine spirit of your life, if not the language of your lips, so long as you remain contented with a cold intellectual assent to the great doctrine of one only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent. For nothing can be clearer than that this one true God is a God of infinite holiness and justice, and that these perfections of his nature make the punishment of sin an absolute necessity, and that this necessity can only be avoided in the person of the sinner by the transfer of his guilt to another, and that Jesus Christ whom God has sent was sent for this very purpose.

These are not mere circumstantial adjuncts of the great truths which we have been considering, but integral and essential elements. There is no revelation of the one true God which is not a revelation of his holiness, *i. e.* the opposition of his nature to all sin, for what is sin but opposition to his nature and his will, and how can he but be opposed to his own opposite, or fail, in the exercise of infinite rectitude and power, to destroy it? And again, if you exclude from your idea of the Christ whom he has sent the capacity and will to save, by self-substitution for the actual

offender, what is left? If you leave this out, you have not even a correct intellectual apprehension of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, and must suffer the same consequences from the want of this essential knowledge that you pity in the doom of the poor heathen.

If you take all this in—if you know God as a God of perfect holiness and justice, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent as a divine and all-sufficient Saviour, and yet bid defiance to the one by refusing to accept the other, your fate can differ from the heathen's only as the fate of one who stumbles in the dark ought to differ from the fall of one who rushes to destruction with his eyes wide open, and amidst the blaze of noon. The course of duty and of safety then is plain. Repent, believe, submit to God by accepting of his Son, and thus prove by your own experience that this is indeed eternal life, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

XX.

PSALM 51, 17.—The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

THE process of salvation is, and must remain, a mystery to those who never shall experience its power. They may apprehend correctly the great doctrines of religion; they may make nice and accurate distinctions in theology; they may speculate ingeniously, and reason powerfully, as to the nature and the means of conversion; but they never can be made to understand, without experience, the mysteries of saving and regenerating grace; the practical mysteries of that deep, noiseless, thorough, total, lasting change, effected in the hearts of men by one touch of God's finger—by one breath of his Spirit. And yet the work is going on among them without ceasing. Ah! how little do the unconverted know of what is passing in the bosoms of their neighbours. How little does their shallow, superficial experience, teach them of the depths of their own hearts, until the fountains of that great abyss are broken up and the windows of heaven opened from above by the same almighty power.

The sanctuary where the broken-hearted sinner

seeks and finds a refuge, may be likened to a temple in the midst of a great city, passed by thousands every hour, but entered only by a few; and yet it is separated from the crowded thoroughfare by no solid wall, or massive seats, but by a veil or curtain which the hand of faith and penitence may raise at pleasure, and through which a strange light glimmers from within and strange sounds fall upon the ear of passers by. And ever and anon some one stops to gaze and listen; he stands still for a moment and then hurries on; another stops, and moved by curiosity draws nearer to the entrance, listens, wavers, turns away, and passes on. Another draws still nearer, looks and listens, lays his hand upon the curtain, and then draws back from the very threshold and is seen no more. Another stops to look and listen, not from idle curiosity, but weary, weak, and sick at heart, despairing of a refuge from the evils which pursue him; he falls prostrate on the threshold—the veil rises for a moment—he is drawn within its shelter, and is seen no more.

But I have represented some who do not enter, as listeners at the threshold; these are they who treat religion with respect and curiosity, but never know its power. As they stand and gaze at the mysterious shadows which are thrown upon the curtain from within, the sound of many mingled voices strikes their ears. These they know to be the voices of regenerated sinners, the elect of God. But it is not the voice of triumph which they thought to hear; it is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, nor yet the voice of them that sing for joy; it is more like "the

voice of them that cry for being overcome." It is a voice of suppressed wailing from a multitude of broken and of breaking hearts, going up like melancholy music to the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth! As the veil of the temple is shaken by the wind, the listener gets a glimpse of its interior; he sees an altar —an altar of atonement—not an altar of oblation—not an altar of burnt offering—but an altar of incense. The bloody sacrifice has been already offered, and accepted, and applied. The blood has been sprinkled and the vapour has ascended; and the penitent who laid his hand upon the victim's head approaches to the golden altar, not to purchase pardon but to offer gifts. And on the altar the oblation lies—a heart—a bruised and broken heart—a heart once stained, alas, how deeply, but now fresh from the laver of regeneration; a heart pierced with many sorrows, the deep scars of which remain, but now melted and broken by the fire and the hammer of God's efficacious word. There it lies encompassed in the newly-kindled flame of pure and holy love; and as it burns there unconsumed, a sweet and solemn voice, like the voice of a parent to a suffering child, says: "My son, give me thine heart;" and another one, still tremulous with weeping, cries out from beneath the altar: "My heart is fixed, oh God, my heart is fixed;" and then a multitude of voices, like the sound of rushing waters, are heard saying all together: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

It is this that the proud, the sensual, and the frivolous cannot understand. It is this mysterious

sacrifice of broken hearts at which they wonder or at which they laugh. Apart from all mistake as to the fundamental doctrine of atonement, they still stumble at this stumbling stone. Who can tell what merriment the men of this world have derived, in this and other ages, from the sighs and tears of penitence? How many sound and good hearts, in the world's estimation and their own, have been made glad and proud of their own greatness, by the anguish of some broken spirit, by the agonizing throbs of some contrite and broken heart. In multitudes of cases the contempt and the derision have been never known to him who was their object, but in multitudes of others, the first pangs of godly sorrow have been strangely mingled with the painful sense that all who pass by wag the head and shoot the lip in bitter scorn; and that the man whom God has smitten is the song of the drunkards in their secret haunts or in their public gatherings to strengthen one another's hands and hearts in Satan's service. Under the pressure of these complicated pains, the penitent is often ready to cry out: "For thy sake I have borne reproach: shame hath covered my face. They that sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song of the drunkards. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none." The dread of this has stifled the incipient convictions of its thousands and its tens of thousands.

Are there none now present, who have thus been driven back, first to silence, then to apathy, and then to sin? Are there none now present who at this very

moment are aware of such a struggle in their hearts? And are there none, nay rather, are there not very many, who can now thank God that they have passed through this fiery ordeal?—who remember when reproach had well nigh broken their hearts too, until the sense of man's derision was absorbed in that of their own guilt before God; until they felt that their excessive sensibility to men's reproaches was a relic of unbroken pride; until they saw that they were but sharers, and small sharers, in the Lord's reproach; and comparing their own trials as to this point with his buffetings and cruel mockings, they were suddenly inflamed with zeal to vindicate *his* honour and forget their own, crying out, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up: the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." Then were they made to understand that the best cure for a heart which pride has broken, is a heart bruised and broken on account of sin; and that while this brokenness of heart is matter of derision to the worldling, "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

How different from this is the experience of the unconverted, unsaved sinner, even when his theoretical opinions of the method of salvation are correct. Let us suppose the case of one well instructed in the doctrines of religion and unable to obliterate the deep intellectual impressions of his early training, but a stranger to the power of religion in his heart. He knows and will acknowledge that he is a sinner; that his sins deserve the wrath and curse of God in this

life and the life to come; that if saved at all he must be saved through Christ; that no outward acts or mental exercises of his own can expiate the guilt of sin; that even faith, to which eternal life is promised, has no merit in the sight of God, but is a mere reception of the grace which brings salvation. All this the man appears to understand, and professes to believe; and under some auspicious influence, he resolves, perhaps, to act upon his principles, believing as he does that atonement has been made; and relying, as he thinks, upon the merit of that sacrifice, he wonders that he has not the assurance of forgiveness, joy and peace in believing, peace of conscience, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But alas, he has to learn that, though the sacrifice which purchases salvation, has been offered once for all upon the cross, and though he cannot cast an atom's weight into the scale of Christ's preponderating merits, there is still a sacrifice which *he* must offer, and without which he can never be accepted; a sacrifice so far from being meritorious or in any degree capable of making expiation for the sins of him who makes it, that it never can be offered but by one whose sin is already covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. The expiatory altar of the Jewish ritual was situated in the open court, and only they who passed by this could draw near to the altar of incense. This secondary sacrifice can be accepted from no hands but those which are already reeking with the blood of the sin offering. In short the sinner knows not, that although his guilt can be removed by nothing but the sacrifice of Christ, his interest in that

atonement can be proved by nothing but the sacrifice of himself—"a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God."

Here is the rock on which the Antinomian of every age concerning faith has made shipwreck. On the pretext that the sacrifice of Christ is all-sufficient, he withholds the oblation of himself to God. Because he has no merit, he believes he has no duty, and throws off at once his sense of goodness and his sense of obligation; and because the grace of God abounds to sinners, he goes on in sin, that grace may abound. But the day is coming when the wood, hay, and stubble of such hopes shall be consumed in the crackling furnace of God's righteous retributions; and even they who thus abused the doctrine of gratuitous salvation, and the all-sufficiency of Christ's atonement, shall see by the glare of the final conflagration, that the sacrifice of Christ for any individual, upon the altar of atonement, is inseparably connected with the self-immolation of the man himself upon the altar of God's service; that no man who rejects the one can lay claim to the other; that Christ gives the purchase of his agonies to no one who refuses or neglects to give himself to God; and that although this self-sacrifice is not demanded as a previous condition of access to Christ, it does arise from it as a necessary consequence, and does therefore serve as an infallible criterion of any person's interest in Christ's atonement.

But let us suppose the sinner to be now convinced of this important truth; to believe, that while his only hope of everlasting life is in the sacrifice of Christ,

he has no right to believe that it was offered up for him, until he offers up himself, through Christ, to God. Here, again, he is liable to fatal error. He may wash his hands in innocency and so compass the altar of God; he may bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar; he may offer it upon the altar with the most imposing rites; but no sweet savour rises from it to the throne of God. The victim and the offerer are alike rejected—

> "For God abhors the sacrifice
> Where not the *heart* is found."

The man has brought his body and his outward wealth, his time, his talents, and his acquisitions, but his heart is left behind. This is the error of the formalist who, whether right or wrong in his conceptions of the method of salvation, whether trusting in his own works as an adjunct of Christ's sacrifice, or believing truly that the sacrifice is all-sufficient, but that it requires and indeed produces a self-sacrifice on man's part, fails, after all, to present the right oblation. Ah, how many well-instructed and apparently sincere professors are there, who, acknowledging their obligation to give all to God, and professing so to do, do in fact withhold the very thing which God requires, endeavouring to please him and to satisfy their consciences by strict compliance with external rules, without a yielding up of the affections of the soul and of the soul itself, which is their reasonable service.

But the heart is not only a necessary part of the required oblation. It is itself the very thing required.

It is the heart which gives vitality and value to the rest. It is because words and actions come forth from the heart, that they have any value; and without this, they are worthless, nay, offensive, as professing to be what they are not. Not only is the sinner bound to sacrifice himself upon the altar of God's service, but to sacrifice his heart, which is indeed himself.

This is a second stage in the progress of discovery to which we may suppose the inquirer's mind to have attained. He knows that if Christ gave himself for him, he must give his heart without reserve to Christ. And here again begins to show itself that spiritual blindness which has been before described. The man consents to give his heart to God, just as it is; but what a heart! It must be laid upon the altar whole, unbroken and unmelted. He consents, perhaps, that it should first be cleansed. He is willing that those deep, dark stains should be washed out, and that those ulcers should be healed by the application of another's blood. This is all that he will offer—all he has to give. But ah, what changes are to pass upon that heart before it is accepted. How little does he think that it must first be pierced and bruised and broken! Or if informed of this necessity, how quickly does his pride revolt! The natural man may be brought to acknowledge his corruption, and to assent in profession to the only means by which it can be purged; but he never can divest himself of his old feelings with respect to the firmness and the stoutness of his heart. He may plead guilty to a mere superficial depravation, but he openly or secretly exults in his integrity and strength of heart. He boasts in time of

trouble that his heart does not fail him, and prides himself upon his openness of heart. He would rather be thought to have a heart of iron than a heart of wax. He lays his hand upon his heart as if to swear by it; and, in short, deifies that very heart which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; and with these very feelings, and especially this confidence and pride in the integrity and firmness of his heart, he sometimes draws near to the altar of his God, there to offer up his hard heart as a sacrifice. But there he is thrust back, with an assurance that his stony heart must first be broken. The result of this discovery is very different in different cases. Some are disgusted by it, and go back forever. Others, towards whom God has purposes of mercy, are subjected to a process which results in an effectual contrition of their hearts. However reluctant they may feel at first to undergo the change, the time comes when they not only feel it, but rejoice in it. As the same apostle who at first said, Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet, said at last, Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

And thus they are brought by the winding course of their experience to the knowledge and belief of these three propositions: 1. Every sinner who is saved through the sacrifice of Christ, must also sacrifice himself to God. 2. This self-immolation must include the heart, or rather it is really an offering of the heart. 3. The heart thus offered must be broken and contrite.

But it is now time to consider in what this brokenness of heart consists. The figure is a common one

perhaps in all languages. In our own, it is one of those expressions which most vividly arouse the sympathies, and with which are associated some of the most tender and affecting images that fancy can create or memory recall. Who is there here, however narrow his experience, who cannot call to mind some memorable case of deep affliction, in which the hopes of the sufferer, so far as this life is concerned, were not only nipped in the bud, or blasted in the flower, but suddenly and violently plucked up by the roots, in which the affections which had twined themselves around earthly objects, were at once and forever snapped asunder, and the soul became dead to the world, not by spiritual crucifixion, but by a providential flash and thunderbolt. It is to such cases of abrupt separation from the hopes and the enjoyments of the present life, that we familiarly apply the figure of a broken heart. And the phrase appears especially appropriate and natural, when those who suffer are in character and circumstances such as to excite compassion unalloyed with any harsh or acrimonious feeling —such as cannot or will not seek a stoical relief in moody silence, or in proud endurance—such as suffer without fault, or through the fault of others—and, above all, such as suffer without hope of reparation in the present life. It is of such that we are wont to speak as broken-hearted; and when the sufferings of such extend to the sudden or gradual decay of life, they are said familiarly to die of broken hearts.

I refer to the ordinary usage of this phrase, in order to illustrate its true sense in application to contrition and repentance—not because there is any sort of sanc-

tity belonging to the sorrow of this world which worketh death. An eminent writer upon practical religion, speaks of that compound of pride and madness, which is usually termed a broken heart; and there can be no doubt, that the broken hearts of poetry and romantic fiction are too often such, as if they really existed, would be followed in the next life by a brokenness of spirit, which no balm would ever heal, and no physician ever bind. Still, the very application of this metaphor to cases of profound and hopeless sorrow, even where it is essentially unholy in its origin and sinful in its exercise, will help us to illustrate its true import when applied to godly sorrow, as a sorrow which involves a loss of hope and a privation of enjoyments and dependences long fondly cherished. While the heart remains unbroken on account of sin, there are certain prospects upon which the eye is prone to fasten and to feed—the illusive forms of future happiness are seen through certain vistas and in certain quarters only. To these points, when the mind conceives the thought of being happy, it instinctively reverts. But when the bruising and the breaking process has begun, these vistas are obstructed, and these prospects fade away, and when the mind instinctively reverts to its accustomed points of joyful expectation, they are veiled in darkness. Thus its fixed associations are dissolved, its ancient hopes unsettled, and its ancient fears give place to new ones; so that, in the confusion of its passions and affections, the heart may be described as being broken in pieces.

But the change which is properly and specially denoted by this figure, is the change from insensibility

and apathy to a directly opposite condition—to a keen susceptibility of shame and grief. It is equally amazing to behold how much the heart can bear, while yet unbroken, and how little is enough to make it quiver with emotion, when the hammer has descended, and the rock is dashed in pieces. If the secrets of two hearts could be disclosed at the same moment—for example, in the hearing of a single sermon—we should see the one receiving, with a calmness too unnatural to be called philosophical, the most momentous doctrines, while the other, by the same enunciation of the same things, is not only agitated but convulsed. The same wind which excites the living waters of Gennesaret into a storm, is said to leave no trace of its effect upon the smooth and silent waters of Asphaltites, the sea of death. But the difference of feeling in the cases now supposed, however great, can never be distinctly seen by others.

There is a case, however, which presents the contrast, at successive turns indeed, but with a vivid clearness to the eye of an observer. I mean when the observer is himself the subject of both states of feeling; when he looks back with amazement to the time when he could hear with cool indifference, the same things which now freeze his blood, or make it boil. Has it never happened in your experience, that you have been apprised of some appalling danger after it was past; of your having just before been standing on a spot where the motion of a limb in one direction would have been your death, a death perhaps of aggravated horror? and when thus apprized of your deliverance, do you not remember the strange thrill

of horror which at once shot through you, suspending for a time your sense of safety, and recalling the sensations proper to your former state? This may serve to illustrate very faintly the retrospective feelings of the sinner, when his heart is broken, in relation to his exercises while it was yet whole. But with this difference, that his amazement has respect not only to the awful danger which he did not feel before, but to the turpitude and guilt of sin to which he was insensible, and his own base ingratitude to God at whose feet he now lies subdued and humbled. It is in sorrow for his sins, as sins against a God of justice and of mercy, that the sinner's heart is said to be broken, not merely softened but broken in pieces and reduced to powder, as the word translated contrite really denotes. True contrition then includes sensibility of conscience and the tenderer affections, with a just apprehension of the evil of sin, not only as considered in its own nature, but also as inherent in the penitent himself. Upon spiritual brokenness of heart as thus explained, I invite your attention to a few remarks, some of which have been implied in what has been already said.

The first remark is, that the broken spirit and the contrite heart are really a sacrifice, a sacrifice to God. I recur to this idea, on account of the opinion which extensively prevails among the hearers of the gospel, and particularly those who are not thoroughly instructed in the doctrines of the Bible, that contrition is a price which we must pay for our salvation, the death of Christ being either excluded altogether, or admitted merely to give weight and value to the sor-

rows of the penitent. How strange it is that one opinion which men never think of acting on in common life should be maintained so seriously and with such tenacity in spiritual matters. He who should undertake to cancel any civil obligation in like manner, to discharge his private debts or pay the penalty of violated laws by mere regret that he had broken or contracted them, would be regarded either as dishonest or a fool. And yet there are wise and honest men, wise and honest as to this world's matters, who regard repentance as an ample compensation for their worst transgressions, and who fasten with avidity on every phrase which seems to favour that opinion. Such a phrase is that before us, which describes the broken spirit as a sacrifice.

Some may be ready to inquire, if this does not mean a satisfaction to God's justice, what else can it mean? It means, as we have seen, a consecration of the heart to God, not in its natural obdurate state, but broken and contrite; a consecration which can never go before the application of Christ's blood and the remission of our sins, but will invariably follow it. They love much to whom much is forgiven, not because forgiveness is the purchase of their love, but because their love is the effect of their forgiveness. So likewise all who are redeemed will offer up a broken heart as a sacrifice, not because their brokenness of heart redeems them, but because whenever Christ saves a sinner, he invariably breaks his heart. The same almighty grace which sets him free from the dominion of the law, sets him likewise free from the obduracy of nature. And as these two deliverances

always go together, there can be no assurance of the one without a satisfactory assurance of the other. We have no right to believe that Christ has died for us, unless we are ready and resolved to live for him. Let us maintain our hold upon both doctrines, and remembering that the only efficacious sacrifice for sin is that of Christ, at the same time remember that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit."

My second observation is, that this is an offering which God does not despise. In the language of the text, it would appear to be implied that God might well have been expected to despise it. And is this not true? Are these worthless, wicked, and deceitful hearts a fit oblation for God's altar? There is wonder in the Psalmist's exclamation, God despises and rejects the costly offerings of princes: gold and silver, pomp and pageantry, he spurns: thou despisest all that wealth or pride can offer at thy footstool, but "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." It is also an expression of his thankfulness. The broken heart itself is thy gift, thou alone canst break it; and having thus bestowed it, thou art pleased to accept of it again at our hands; thou requirest nothing but a broken contrite heart; "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." At the same time there is humble and rejoicing confidence. Since thou art pleased to ask nothing but a broken and a contrite heart, I despair no longer; only break my hard heart more completely by the sense of thy forgiving mercy, and I ask no more, for I can then come before thee with a broken

and a contrite heart forever, and "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

In the third place, I remark that though a holy and a righteous God accepts the sacrifice, ungodly men despise it. It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of man. The chastisements of God are tender mercies to his people, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. The licentious, proud, and selfish worldling, who believes that he does honour to God's word by hearing it, and whose religion is a condescending patronage of Christ and his salvation, hates and scorns a broken spirit and a contrite heart as heartily and proudly as the evil one himself. Let the humble Christian be prepared for the contempt of those whose hearts were never broken, and amidst "the proud man's contumely," let him lift his heart to heaven and breathe the Psalmist's confident assurance, "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Again, we may remark that in the church itself, there may be those who, while they wear the yoke of Christ, appear impatient of its pressure; these are the worshippers of manly Christianity, who love religion in its fierce, and proud, and insolent disguises, but disdain it in its unadorned simplicity and meekness. How far such a spirit is compatible with brokenness of heart and deep contrition, let those who cherish it determine for themselves by comparing their own feelings and habitual dispositions with the language of the Psalmist, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

In conclusion, there are no doubt many who now hear me, that are perfectly unconscious of the slightest feeling which could be, without absurdity, described as a broken spirit and a contrite heart. To such the subject is and must be unintelligible, and they are perhaps disposed in secret to rejoice that it is so. Believing as they do that the experience of this change would deprive them of the only pleasures which they are now capable of relishing, they may perhaps console themselves by thinking that "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." It is not my design, by a vain reiteration, to attempt to change your present feelings in relation to this matter. But I wish, before I close, to guard your minds if possible against a very natural illusion, with respect to the future.

The unbroken heart is always loth to think that it can ever be subdued. As it invariably glories in its strength, it cannot bear the thought of losing it. Some in the madness of their pride resolve that they will rather lose eternal life, than gain it by humiliating weaknesses. Others, unwilling to proceed so far, merely dismiss the subject from their thoughts, while a third class persuade themselves that though they must repent and be converted, they may certainly do this without a loss of native dignity, or the indulgence of unmanly weakness. And accordingly their purpose is to keep a good heart even in repenting, and to quit themselves like men in the salvation of their souls. The eye of my imagination rests upon one who would rather be detected in a crime, than in the shedding of a tear for crimes already perpetrated;

one who would rather break than bend; one who would rather be broken by God's wrath than by his mercy; one, in whose nature this satanic pride is so profoundly fixed, that he is utterly unable to conceive of it as possible that his heart ever can be broken either by misfortune or repentance.

The scene is changed, and I behold that same man still a hearer of the gospel, but his countenance is altered. He still maintains a posture of resistance, but his eye is restless and his brow contracted, and I read in his vain efforts to suppress and hide his feelings, that the enemy he once despised has found his way into the fortress of his heart. There is commotion there. There is a deadly struggle between flesh and spirit. With desperate strength the strong man guards his palace, but a stronger than he is there. He would rather die than yield to his convictions. His soul chooses strangling rather than life. He reflects with horror on the scorn and contumely which await his fall, and in the anguish of that fear, he summons every motive and musters all his strength to hold united his already bursting heart; but in the crisis of his last convulsive effort it is broken, it is broken. The most incredible of all impossibilities is realized. The stony heart is broken, and the man who feared and hated it in prospect, now rejoices in it. The tears which once he would rather die than shed, flow freely. The man is willing in the day of God's power, and as he looks up at the cross beneath which his obdurate heart was broken, and beholds the bleeding sacrifice by which his life was purchased, he throws as it were the bruised fragments of his heart

at the Redeemer's feet, beneath the droppings of his blood, and says "lie there forever," while from every wound of him who hangs upon the cross a voice responds: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Of such, some no doubt are saved, saved perhaps as by fire. Would to God, that this might be the end of all who now despise the gospel, and resolve that no misfortune, and no spiritual influence shall ever break their hearts. Well might the contrite and the broken-hearted Christian bear "the proud man's contumely" and the scoffer's sneer, if by such endurance he could purchase the consolatory hope that his despisers should be one day broken-hearted like himself. But, alas, with Scripture and with history before us, where shall we take refuge from the fear, that to many who now make a mock of sin and of repentance, and who trample on the broken heart, the last words of the Saviour, as he points to his despised ones will be, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish!"

It is matter of thankfulness that we who preach the gospel, are not authorized to read the future history of those who now reject salvation, and that God has invested this distressing subject with a shroud of intermingled hope and fear. But notwithstanding this compassionate reserve, it may be said without presumption, that among those who are now disposed to laugh at the idea of a broken heart, there are some who, though they never shall experience the power of subduing grace, shall yet know by experience what it is to be heart-broken. Methinks I see one of this

class also, at another time, and in another place. I see him surrounded by the comforts, and the honours, and the pleasures of the world. I see him still a cold, fastidious hearer of the gospel. I see him regarding with a proud contempt the penitent contrition of his fellow-sinner. I see him laugh in scorn at the idea of his own heart being broken. I see him arm himself with stoical philosophy, with heathen fortitude, with hellish pride. But while I see him watchful upon one side, I behold his enemy approaching on another. While he surrounds the garden of his happiness with walls or hedges to repel wild beasts, I see the flower on his favourite vine begin to droop, and sicken till it drops into the earth a withered weed. I see the vine itself decaying in its branches and its stock, until the root alone is left. I see the soul of the proud sinner touched with exquisite exactness in its most unguarded and most vulnerable points. I see the appetite for earthly pleasure "sicken and so die," with nothing better to succeed it. I see the man as he looks back upon the wilderness and forward to the ocean, as he turns with a sore conscience from the trackless sands, gaze with anxious apprehension on the trackless waters. "His strength is hungerbitten," and his courage spent. Is this the man who braved misfortune, and defied conviction? Is it he who laughed at the idea of a broken heart, and vowed that his heart never could be broken? Is it he who even now has only strength enough to hide, and that at the expense of most excruciating torments, the approaching fracture of his own proud spirit, for a few more days of unimaginable anguish, till in the very

article of death, his heart and flesh give way together, and he who boasted of a whole heart while he lived, dies of a broken heart at last. Ah, my hearers, you may think it a mere fiction of romance that men should die of broken hearts. But when the records of God's righteous retributions are unfolded, some of us may see that this and that man whose decease was here ascribed to accident or bodily disease, were the victims of an obstinate, unbending spirit, and of a wounded, ulcerated conscience, were consumed by secret efforts to suppress conviction, and at last, after all their proud derision and bravado, died of broken hearts. Is it then the case, you may be ready to inquire, that they who pass through life, without experience of sorrow, and devoid of sensibility; who steep themselves in selfish and ignoble pleasures, till their souls are callous; is it true that these alone are to escape the sad experience of a broken heart?

My hearers, there are two very common errors in relation to the future state of those who die impenitent. The one is the idea, that because the tree must lie just as it falls, because he who is filthy must be filthy still; men can deprive themselves in some degree of that susceptibility of pain which is essential to the misery of hell. Hence there have been men who, as their death approached, chose to stupefy their minds with intoxicating liquors, partly no doubt for the purpose of excluding all reflection on the future; partly from unbelief of any future state, but in many cases, I have no doubt also, in the hope that their stupefied and brutal apathy would still continue in the other world. Think of this vain attempt to quench

the flames of Tophet with intoxicating liquors, or with any other stupefying drug, and then imagine, if you can, the awaking of that spirit after death. The only gift of God to the lost sinner is the gift of sensibility unknown before: a gift which shall overwhelm with shrinking shame, the man, the woman, to whom shame is now a stranger; agitate with terror those who now are brave, and sting with keen remorse the consciences of those whose hearts are never visited in this life by the dread of wrath, or by the consciousness of guilt. Whatever other changes may await us, be assured, my hearers, that the day is coming when the most unfeeling shall be made to feel.

XXI.

JAMES 1, 2–8.—My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

THE questions which have been raised in reference to the author of this epistle, however interesting they may be to the historical critic, are of very little exegetical importance. Whether it be the work of James the son of Zebedee, as the old Syriac translators, and perhaps some others thought, or of James the son of Alphæus, which has been the prevalent opinion in all ages of the church, or James the brother of the Lord, not a member of the apostolic body, but the bishop or pastor of the church at Jerusalem, of whom contemporary history relates that he was called the Just or Righteous, and whose death, at the hands of the infuriated Zealots, is described by the same author as an immediate cause or occasion of the Fall of Jeru-

salem; these are alternative hypotheses, our choice of which cannot materially affect our view of the design and meaning of the book itself.

The doubts respecting its canonical authority among the ancients, as in the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews, sprang from its having been addressed to Jews or Jewish Christians, and not made known to the Gentile churches until after some time had elapsed. The like doubts, entertained by Luther and some other modern writers, have been founded on a supposed contrariety between the teachings of James and Paul, as to the fundamental doctrine of justification. The little currency which this opinion has obtained among believing readers and interpreters shows that its supposed ground is imaginary, and that there is no reason even for assuming two divergent types of Christian doctrine, an ingenious figment which has been carried to extremes by certain German theologians of our own day. A key to all the difficulties of the case is furnished by the simple supposition that the epistle presupposes what is taught in other parts of the New Testament, and is intended, not to communicate the fundamental truths of Christianity, but to correct abuses of them which had already shown themselves, perhaps especially in certain portions of the church and under certain circumstances, among which one was probably the influence of persecution, and the peculiar trials and temptations which it brought along with it, and in which the apostle here exhorts his readers to rejoice, just as Paul, in still more general terms, exhorts "us to rejoice always."

This positive injunction of the Christian ethics

may seem too difficult, if not impossible, to be obeyed. And even if the natural repugnance to suffering can be so far vanquished as to make distress itself a subject and occasion of rejoicing, the moral sense still shrinks from what is here commanded, to rejoice in temptation. The paradox is not to be removed by violently changing the established meaning of the word, which never means affliction simply, but in every case conveys the idea of a moral trial, or a test of character. The petition which our Lord himself prescribes, "Lead us not into temptation," cannot be a mere deprecation of adversity, as something painful. Had not popular usage lowered the meaning of our own word "trial" as applied to providential changes, so that it now expresses little more than pain or privation, it would correspond exactly to the Greek term here used, and applied to sufferings or afflictions, not as such, or as mere chastisements, or means of grace, but as tests or touchstones of the sufferer's dispositions and affections, of his faith, and patience, and obedience, to which the term is as legitimately applicable as it is to those direct solicitations to evil which are commonly denoted by the word "temptation."

But even this word temptation strictly denotes trial, *i. e.*, moral trial, trial of character, and merely comprehends within it that specific mode of trial which consists in direct attempts to make men sin, by exciting their sinful dispositions, setting before them the unlawful object, and affording them the means and opportunity of actual transgression. All this, I say, which is the ordinary meaning of the word

"temptation," is but one form—though undoubtedly the worst form—of that whole testing process which the term in Greek as well as English primarily signifies. The question whether it is here used in its narrower or wider sense may be determined by the context, where the fruit of sanctified temptation is described as patience, patient endurance. But the fruit and remedy of temptation in the ordinary sense is not the habit of endurance but of strong resistance. To be patient under the suggestions of the devil, the seductions of the world, and the corruptions of our own heart, would imply acquiescence, not to say complacency in evil. A temptation, to which patience is the proper antidote, must be specifically a temptation to impatience, insubordination, a rebellious and repining temper, and these are just the sinful dispositions and affections to which we are tempted by a state of suffering. We must therefore understand the words as having reference to those providential trials of men's faith and patience in which they are rather passive than active, and under which their appropriate duty is not so much resistance as submission. But even these trials and temptations are not to be sought for or solicited. It is not in voluntary, wilful subjection to them through our own fault, or in the indulgence of our own perverse ambition to be martyrs or confessors, that we are encouraged or commanded to rejoice, but when we "fall into" them or among them, so as to be quite encompassed and enveloped by them, as the traveller from Jerusalem to Jericho, in the parable of the good Samaritan, "fell among" thieves or robbers; the original expression

being just the same in either case, and in the only other place where it occurs, (Acts 27, 41,) although applied to a kind of trial altogether different, the running of a ship aground, it still suggests the same idea of unstudied, unintentional, unforeseen emergencies, and therefore makes it still more certain that the trials in which we are commanded to rejoice are not those into which we presumptuously rush, but those into which we unintentionally fall, and which, for that very reason, are better suited to make proof of our obedience to the will of God, and of our trust in his power and willingness to keep us. The difficulty of complying with this general injunction may appear to be enhanced by the variety of outward forms and circumstances under which the work of providential trial may be carried on, including all the numberless and nameless "ills that flesh is heir to."

How can all these be reduced to one description, or provided for by one prescription? Though it may be rational and right, and therefore must be possible, if not always easy, to rejoice in one variety of such temptations, it does not follow necessarily that it is possible or right in all. But this objection or misgiving as to the extent of the apostle's requisition, is anticipated and precluded by himself in the express use of the epithet "divers," manifold, multiform, diversified, the sensible quality originally signified being that of variety in colours, particoloured, piebald, motley, and therefore well adapted, by a natural association, to express in a lively manner the idea of diversity in general, as if he had said—however varied the complexion of the trials into which you fall, or by

which you are encompassed, I tell you still to "count it joy" and "all joy," not by a figure of speech or paradoxical abuse of language; so that, according to the famous saying of a great diplomatist, it serves to conceal thought rather than express it, saying one thing and meaning another; not in a limited degree, as implying that a little joy may possibly be squeezed out of the heart surcharged with grief; not with a stoical apathy, affecting to confound or identify pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow; but in the true sense, and the full sense, and the Christian sense of the expression, let us count our providential trials "all joy," nothing but joy, as Paul tells the Ephesians, Christ has abounded towards us "in all wisdom and prudence;" and exhorts them to walk worthy of their vocation "with all lowliness and meekness," (Eph. 1, 8; 4, 2,) all kinds and all degrees of wisdom in the one case, and of meekness in the other. So here, it is not the mere name, or the mere pretence, or some infinitesimal degree of joy, that believers under trial are to exercise, but "all joy" as opposed to none, and to too little, and to every kind of counterfeit. So far from grieving or repining when you fall into divers trials, "count it all joy." But as we know, both from Scripture and experience, that "no chastening *for the present* seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, and that *afterward* (ὕστερον) it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby," (Heb. 12, 11,) it is not unreasonable to suppose that the joy here required is not a joy to be experienced in the very article or stress of the temptation, but a joy to be engendered by a believing, grateful re-

trospection of the trial after it is past, or at least, after the first shock is over, and the soul is able to reflect upon it. This is perfectly consistent with the form of expression (ὅταν περιπέσητε) which might even be translated to mean "when" or "after," "ye have fallen into divers trials," so as, at least, to suggest the idea, that this is not a joy to be indulged in prospect of the trial or temptation, which might too easily degenerate into a proud, presumptuous, self-confident defiance, or even a fanatical solicitation of such trials, which is something very different from the humble, grateful joy of having been subjected to them for a wise and gracious purpose, and brought through them, and then out of them in safety.

This precise determination of the time at which the joy is to be exercised, as not the time of actual endurance, much less that of previous expectation, but rather that of subsequent reflection—I mean subsequent, if not to the whole trial, yet at least to its inception—this, I say, may throw some light on two points which have been already mentioned, but perhaps not yet made wholly clear. The first is the paradoxical aspect of the exhortation to rejoice in that which necessarily involves pain and suffering. The paradox, to say the least, may seem less startling if we understand the text as calling upon men to rejoice, not that they *are* suffering, or *while* they suffer, although even this does not transcend the limits of experience, as we know from the triumphant joy of martyrs at the stake, and of many a lowlier believer on his deathbed, but that they *have* suffered, that it *has* pleased God, without their own concurrence, to

afford them the occasion of attesting their fidelity, and patience, and submission to his will. Such joy, in the recollection of past trials, has so many analogies in general experience, that it cannot even be called "paradoxical" without injustice.

The other point on which the same consideration may throw some light, is the choice of an expression which, although it primarily signifies no more than moral trial or a test of character, in general usage does undoubtedly denote a positive solicitation to do wrong. For even in this worst sense of temptation, it may be a subject of rejoicing, not beforehand, no, nor in the very crisis of the spiritual conflict; but when that is past, and when the soul, unconscious of its danger till it could no longer be avoided, looks back upon the fearful risk from which it has escaped, not merely with gratitude for its deliverance, but with unaffected joy that there was such a risk to be delivered from, because it has now served to magnify God's grace, and at the same time to attest its own fidelity. Just as the soldier, who would have been guilty of the grossest rashness and the most unpardonable violation of his orders, if he had deliberately thrown himself into the way of a superior enemy, may—when unexpectedly surrounded and attacked, he has heroically cut his way through—rejoice, not only in his safety, but in the very danger which compelled him to achieve it.

But the joy experienced in the case before us is not merely retrospective, but prospective also. It is not an ignorant or blind joy, but is founded in knowledge, knowledge not only of the principles on which

men ought to act, but of the consequences which may be expected from a certain course of action or of suffering; for as we have already seen, it is of passive, rather than of active or positive obedience, that James is speaking. The trials or temptations of the Christian are the test or touchstone of his faith, both in the strict and comprehensive sense. They put to the proof his trust in God, his belief of what God says, of what he promises. But in so doing, they afford the surest test of his religion, of his whole religious character. Specific trust in God's veracity and faithfulness is not and cannot be an independent, insulated quality, or act, or habit. It must have its causes and effects homogeneous to itself in the man's creed, in his heart, in his life. Among these is a definite reliance on God's mercy, not as a mere attribute of the divine nature, but as offered and exercised in a specific form, the only form in which it can be offered or received by sinners. The text says nothing expressly of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but every believer in this Saviour who peruses the epistle, feels that it is presupposed, assumed, or taken for granted, so that the contracted form of speech here used, conveys to such a reader all that is expressed in the beginning of the second chapter, where the one word "faith" is amplified into the "faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glorious," or "the Lord of Glory." What is there said explicitly, is here said by necessary implication. He who could use the longer form, could not use the shorter without meaning to suggest more than he says. There is therefore no violence whatever done to the apostle's language, when we under-

stand him to describe temptation as a test of sincere belief in Christ as "the only name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved" from sin as well as punishment, and not of mere reliance on the power and willingness of God to deliver or preserve from suffering. In both these senses, or in both these applications and extensions of the term, faith is necessarily included in the religious character, of which a test is furnished by providential trials or temptations.

But it does not merely furnish present evidence of faith. It produces a permanent effect upon the character. It generates a habit—that of patient endurance, that of steadfast perseverance in the way of God's commandments. For of patience, as of faith, it may be said that it cannot stand alone, it cannot exist independently of other virtues, other graces, other traits of Christian character. The principle of active and passive obedience is the same. He who will not do God's will cannot endure it in a Christian spirit. He can only endure it in the way of punishment. Evangelical patience presupposes, includes, or carries with it evangelical obedience or activity. It therefore comprehends a very large part of experimental and practical religion, and to say that it is fostered and matured by trial, is to say that trial or temptation, in the sense here put upon the term, is an important means of grace, of spiritual growth, and instead of being angrily complained of or sullenly repined at as a hardship or a cruelty, ought not indeed to be desired or courted any more than medicines, especially when composed of poisons, should be used as ordinary

food; but when administered, without our agency or even option, by the Great Physician, should be thankfully submitted to, and afterwards rejoiced in, as a potent agency of God's appointment which produces great effects, not by a sudden or immediate change, but as the original expression seems to mean, by a gradual and long-continued alterative process; for the trial of our faith "worketh out," elaborates, and as it were laboriously cultivates a habit of persistent and unwavering obedience and submission to the will of God, both in the way of doing and suffering.

That the patience thus commended is not an inert and sluggish principle, much less a mere condition of repose, but something active in itself and tending to activity in others, is evident enough from the apostle's exhortation, not to hinder it or check it in its operation, but to give it free scope, let it have its perfect work or full effect. Could this be said of mere inertia, or even patient nonresistance? Is it not implied, or rather is it not expressly said that this divine ὑπομονὴ, this principle and habit of patient continuance in doing and suffering the will of God, is not a mere superfluous embellishment of Christian character, a work of supererogation added to its necessary elements by way of doing more than man needs or than God requires, but itself an element that cannot be dispensed with, and without which neither sufferers nor actors in God's service can be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." How many, in compounding their ideal of a perfect Christian character, forget to put in patience, and how many, who in theory acknowledge its necessity, refuse to let it "have its perfect work" in their experience and practice!

All this affords abundant room for wise discrimination and a sound discretion. It is evidently not a matter which can be disposed of or conducted to a safe and happy issue by mere audacity or force of will, by cutting knots which ought to be untied, or by a reckless disregard of delicate distinctions and perplexing questions which arise from the very nature both of God and man, and from their mutual relations, and which can neither solve themelves, nor be solved by any intellectual force short of wisdom in the highest sense; not mere knowledge, not even genuine and solid knowledge, much less the capacity of barren speculation, but wisdom in the noble sense attached to it even by profane philosophers, intellectual powers and resources under the control of moral principle, and faithfully applied to moral uses; a wisdom shown in the selection of the highest ends, and in the application of the most effective means to gain them. This wisdom, the idea of which was familiar to the wisest of the heathen, has been realized only in the school of revelation. And woe to him who undertakes, without it, to solve the intricate and fearful problem of man's character and destiny! This can be done successfully, and even safely, only by the wise man, and in the actual use and exercise of real wisdom. He who attempts it otherwise can only be regarded as a madman throwing about firebrands, arrows, and death, and saying, Am I not in sport? This is no arbitrary or unmeaning requisition, for unless we abandon the very definition and idea of true wisdom as chimerical, we cannot possibly conceive of any higher or more necessary use to which its possessors

can apply it, or for which those who have it not are bound to seek it.

But how, or where? they may be ready to demand. In what quarter, or by what means is this transcendent, superhuman wisdom, to be made available for those who need it? If no exertion of man's unassisted reason, no reach of speculation, no variety of knowledge, no extent of observation, no depth of experience, can supply this want even to the wisest, what shall he do who lays claim to so much dignity, but feels himself to be deficient in this most essential point? My brethren, whoever does feel this deficiency, whoever in his own conviction does lack wisdom, and does really desire to have it, is the very man who has no right or reason to despair of it—the very one for whom this scripture makes express provision—first, by pointing out the only source from which his want can be supplied, and then by assuring him that he may confidently draw upon it. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." The "if" is not expressive of a doubt, but presupposes an unquestionable fact, or rather the doubt which it does seem to express relates not to the fact itself, but to the *sense* of it—not to the actual necessity and absence of true wisdom in the case of every fallen man, of every sinner to be saved, for this is certain and notorious, attested both by revelation and experience, but to the *consciousness* of this deficiency, the want of which is part and parcel of our native blindness; nothing but wisdom can reveal our folly We do not even *feel* our mental maladies until the healing process is begun, in strict accordance with the wisest

saying of the wisest of the ancient Greeks, that he knew nothing certainly, except that he knew nothing. This epigrammatic maxim is the shell or wrapper of a very profound truth, to have discovered which is the highest honour of the man who uttered it—a truth, however, which to him and to the wisest of his followers was a mere negation, one of sweeping magnitude and awful import, but a negation still; the positive correlative of which was, what "the world by wisdom" was for ages striving after without ever grasping, till at length God pitied them; and seeing that the world, with all its wisdom, knew not God, was pleased to save them that believe by the foolishness of preaching,—by the promulgation of a new philosophy which seemed mere folly to the wise men of the world, as it reduced their wisdom to the simple and most unphilosophical acknowledgment of Socrates, and made the conscious lack of wisdom as to spiritual matters indispensable as a condition of reception into its school among its disciples; and to those who felt it, and confessed it, simply saying, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."

My hearers, familiar, elementary, and almost triticál as this may seem to *our* eyes, bleared and dazzled by the blaze of gospel light, it was a grand discovery and a vast advance upon the previous achievements of the human mind. It is like uncovering the sun to those who have been trying to strike light from the flint, or digging for it under ground. All that the schools of Greece and Egypt and the East had been saying for a course of ages was—let no man think that he lacks wisdom, for he has it in himself—or at

most, if any man lack wisdom, let him come to me; but when the voice of the Evangelizing Angel whom John saw in his apocalyptic vision became audible, the schools were silent, and the oracles were dumb, before that simple precept to which we attach so little value—"If any one of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." But this asking of God was to the Greeks a mockery. Even those who believed in God had no conception of immediate spiritual intercourse with God, still less of intellectual illumination, sent directly from him. They knew what it was to work out wisdom for themselves, or to seek for wisdom at the hands of human sages; but this was a new idea—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." And that not as a ceremony, but a means, a certain means of acquisition—not of God the unknown and the unapproachable, but God the giver, God who gives, who actually gives, has given, will give again, will give forever. This is no rash venture, but a matter of experience. You are only asked to do what others, nay, what multitudes have done before you—ask of God, of God himself. What, directly, without any mediation, without any but his Son's, without any influence but that of his Spirit, which is his own, without the intervention of philosophers or priests, without circuitous or ceremonial methods of approach! As simply as a child asks food of a parent, "if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," "of God the giver, God who giveth,"—who habitually giveth, not to certain favoured nations, castes, or individuals, but to all men—not to Greeks or Jews alone, not to philosophers or priests alone, but to all men—

yes, to all men, *i. e.* all who ask, all who really desire it, all who ask aright.

Like other great discoveries, it seems almost incredible that this should never have been stumbled on before; that among the numberless expedients for supplying the deficiencies of human wisdom, this should never have occurred, in its simplicity, to any of the heathen sages, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who actually giveth unto all men." How? In what way? In what spirit? There is something really sublime in the simplicity with which this question is here answered. It is not only simple, but simplicity itself. "He giveth simply." The very grandeur of this phrase has hindered and embarrassed its interpretation. It seems to say too little, when in fact it says too much for us to compass. It seems to be irrelevant, when nothing can be more precisely adapted to the end proposed. The doubtful and secondary meanings which have been preferred, if not inadmissible, are all superfluous. "He giveth liberally" is suggested rather than expressed; "he giveth simply" is the naked sense of the original—or perhaps it may be rendered more precisely still, "he simply gives,"—he gives—he gives—and that is all. He does not give, and not give, as some men too often do; he does not give and take as some men do; he does not give and nullify the kind act by unkind words or disclosing unkind motives; he does not give as many a proud human benefactor gives, and then upbraid the beneficiary with his wants, his weakness, his unworthiness, his former gifts,—"he simply gives;" "he gives to all men and upbraideth not." This

human propensity to mar the value of a gift by mixtures of unkindness or ill-timed severity, was so familiar to the ancients as to be embodied in their proverbs. But from all these mixtures, and from others like them, and from every thing that poisons human favours, God's are infinitely, wholly free. The best of men give only to some objects, and with some accompanying drawbacks; but he simply gives,—he gives to all men and upbraideth not.

My brethren, for such a giver is it too much to expect, that he who asks shall ask in faith and in sincerity, desiring what he asks, believing in God's willingness and power to bestow it? If God giveth, simply giveth, and upbraideth not, is it too much to require that man should ask, and doubt not, and dissemble not, and waver not? If God gives simply, singly, with a pure, unmixed, unqualified benevolence, is it too much to require that man should not ask doubly, hypocritically—no; nor even with a double mind or soul in a less offensive sense, the sense of instability and vacillation, sometimes wishing, sometimes not—now asking this, now that—asking, and then refusing to receive the very thing before desired. Respect for even human benefactors requires that the petitioner should know his own mind before asking, and not lightly change it after asking. And is less respect due to that glorious Giver, who, with every reason to refuse still giveth, and with every right to make distinctions giveth unto all men alike? and with every right and every reason to accompany his gifts with hard conditions, and with harsh upbraidings, simply giveth, freely giveth and upbraideth

not? Is it too much for him to say of every one who asketh, "let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," either in trust or purpose—not at variance with himself—not self-contradictory in his petitions—not a man of two minds, or of two souls, or of two hearts, but of one, and that one fixed on God, on Christ? No; so easy and so reasonable a condition scarce deserves the name, especially as he who asks it gives it. Well might the wisest of the Fathers pray, "Give what thou requirest, and require what thou wilt!" It is an insult of the grossest kind to God the giver, to bring into his presence a mind tossing with tumultuous and inconsistent passions, like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but casteth up mire and dirt. "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord," but only he who, through divine grace, can exclaim—"My heart is fixed, oh God, my heart is fixed!" The man whose heart is wavering and double is not merely deficient in his prayers, but in his whole religious character, of which his prayers are but an index; he is inconsistent and inconstant, fickle and "unstable in all his ways." While he thus reasons he cannot therefore expect God to give him wisdom, that transcendent wisdom, without which patience cannot have her perfect work, or extract her spiritual food out of the medicine of trial and the poison of temptation. And yet this is our last resort; if this fail us, there is no hope elsewhere. Whither shall we turn in search of wisdom but to Him who giveth freely unto all men and upbraideth not. We come back therefore to the conclusion, that if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

XXII.

Isaiah 5, 20.—Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

If the judgments of men are habitually influenced by their affections, it is not surprising that their speech should bear the impress of the same controlling power. What we hear men say in the way of passing judgment upon things and persons, unless said deliberately for the purpose of deceiving those who hear them, will afford us, for the most part, a correct idea of their dispositions and prevailing inclinations. There is indeed a customary mode of talking, practised by some men, in which familiar formulas of praise and censure, as to moral objects, are employed as if by rote, involving the admission of important principles, and recognizing in its full extent the grand distinction between moral good and evil. Such men will speak familiarly of other men, and of their acts, as right or wrong, as virtuous or vicious, in a manner which implies not only preference of judgment but of inclination; so that if we draw conclusions from their language merely, we should certainly infer that they not

only understood the principles of sound morality, but loved them and obeyed them. The latter conclusions would, in too many instances, be found to be erroneous, not because the person, in his talk, was guilty of deliberate hypocrisy, or even intended to deceive at all, but because his words conveyed more than he meant, especially when phrases used of course, and by a sort of habit, came to be subjected to the rules of a strict interpretation. But in all such cases it will soon be found, upon a little observation, that the dialect in question, however near it may approach to that of evangelical morality, is still distinguished from it by indubitable marks,—to one of which I shall direct your notice, and have no doubt that it will be immediately confirmed by your own experience.

If, then, you know any one who thus indulges in the use of such conventional expressions as imply a recognition of those principles of morals which are laid down in the Bible, but whose conduct, on the other hand, repudiates and nullifies them—have you not observed, that in expressing his opinions upon moral subjects, he avoids, as if instinctively, those terms of censure and of approbation which belong distinctively to scripture, and confines himself to those which are common to the Bible and the heathen moralists, to Christian ethics and the code of honour. He will speak of an act, or a course of acts, as wrong, perhaps as vicious,—it may even be as wicked, but not as *sinful*. There are crimes and vices, but no sins in his vocabulary. The difference between the terms, as viewed by such a person, seems to be that vice and crime are referable merely to an abstract

standard, and perhaps a variable one; while sin brings into view the legislative and judicial character of God.

Sin too is associated, in most minds, with the humiliating doctrine of a natural depravity, while vice and crime suggest the idea of a voluntary aberration on the part of one, by nature free from taint, and abundantly able to stand fast in his own strength. By tracing such diversities, however slight and trivial they seem to be when in themselves considered, we may soon learn to distinguish the characteristic dialect of worldly moralists from that of evangelical religion. It will also be found, that in the use of terms employed by both, there is a difference of sense, it may be unintentional, denoting no small difference in point of principle. Especially is this the case in reference to those important principles of morals which bear most directly upon the ordinary business of life, and come most frequently into collision with the selfish interests and inclinations of ungodly men. Two men for instance shall converse together upon truth and falsehood, upon honesty and fraud, employing the same words and phrases, and perhaps aware of no diversity of meaning in their application. In their principles and feelings they shall seem to coincide, both approving and condemning with a perfect unanimity. And yet when you come to ascertain the sense in which they severally use the terms employed by both, you shall find that while the one adopts the rigorous and simple rule of truth and falsehood, which is laid down in the Bible and by common sense, the other holds it with so many qualifications and excep-

tions, as almost to render it a rule more honoured in the breach than the observance. The one is so tolerant of innocent deceptions, and of jocose lies, or of conventional concealments and pretences in the way of business, that the other, when he comes to understand him, finds the ground on which he stood swept away by these insidious refinements, and begins to feel that even in morals the old proverb is a true one, what is one man's food may be another man's poison.

There can be no doubt that this unperceived and undefinable diversity in the use of language, exerts a constant and extensive influence on human intercourse, and leads to many of those misconceptions which are tending daily to increase the mutual distrust of men in one another's candour and sincerity. But while it is unquestionably true that the language which men hold in regard to moral subjects, is not, in every case, a sure criterion of their own dispositions, even where there is no direct intention to deceive; there remains, after all allowable deduction upon this score, an extensive field of curious and profitable observation. There are multitudes of instances, to which the force of habit and colloquial usage, as explained already, do not reach, and which are therefore fair occasions for employing men's expressions as a test of their secret inclinations and the state of their affections. And in this there is very little danger of injustice to the subject of the scrutiny. The cases which have been already mentioned are exceptions to the general rule, or rather to its rigid application, that "out of the abundance of the heart

the mouth speaketh;" all tend to favour him whose words are taken as an index to his character. The exception which has been admitted is not that men are often better than their words would represent them, but the contrary. If indeed it were commonly or often true that men employ language which implies a denial or a disregard of moral distinctions, and indeed a preference of evil to good, while in fact they are not only sound in judgment, upon this essential point, but cordially disposed to give the preference to virtue, then indeed it might be possible to do them gross injustice by the use of such a test.

But who pretends to think that men are often, I might almost say ever, better in the bent of their affections and their moral dispositions than in the general drift of their discourse? Who does not know that they are often worse, and that where any marked diversity exists, the difference is commonly in favour of his words at the expense of his thoughts and feelings? If we err therefore in the application of the test proposed, we are far more apt to err in favour of the subject than against him. If his words are in truth an exponent of his feelings, we shall do him justice; if not, there is every reason to believe that he is worse than he appears to be. Let it, however, be observed, that nothing could be more unjust or utterly subversive of impartial judgment, in this matter, than to choose as tests or symptoms mere occasional expressions. Few men are so bad that they never speak good sentiments. And alas for the best, if they must stand or fall by their ability or inability to prove that they have never uttered splenetic, or

frivolous, or unbecoming language. The holiest men have had occasion to lament their own delinquencies in this respect; while, on the other hand, notorious profligates and unbelievers have been known to utter sentiments of pure and stern morality, with such apparent earnestness and candour, that the hearers might have been excused for crying out, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" It is not by such ebullitions, whether good or evil, that the heart is to be judged, but by the general tone and tenor of the conversation upon moral subjects. It would not be just or safe to say that he who has been known to bear his testimony to the excellence of virtue, is a good man, even in the worldly sense; or on the other hand, that he who has been heard to speak deridingly, or spitefully, or doubtfully of fundamental principles in morals, is infallibly a villain, though the latter conclusion would be far more warrantable than the former, for a reason before stated. But it may be said with due regard to truth and justice, in the abstract, and in application to the character of individuals, that he who habitually, and as if by impulse, takes the side of virtue, without partiality and without hypocrisy, is virtuous himself; and that he who in like manner is invariably prompted, when there is no outward counteracting influence, to call evil good, and good evil, is one who, like the fallen angel, says in his heart, "Evil, be thou my good!" and is therefore a just subject of the woe denounced by the prophet in the text. It may indeed be thought that this expression is descriptive, not so much of those who hate good

and love evil, as of those who err as to what is good and what is evil.

But it must not be forgotten that a rational nature is incapable of loving evil, simply viewed as evil, or of hating good, when simply viewed as good. Whatever thing you love, you thereby recognize as good; and what you hate or abhor, you thereby recognize as evil. To hate a thing, and yet regard it as a good thing, is a mere contradiction, if the terms be taken in the same sense, or referred to the same standard of comparison. No man can dislike a taste, or smell, or sound which, at the same time, he regards as pleasant, nor can he like one which he thinks unpleasant. To regard a thing as pleasant is to like it, and to dislike it is to think it disagreeable. But change the standard of comparison, and what appeared impossible is realized. The music which is sweetest to your ear may be offensive when it breaks the slumber of your sleeping friend; the harshest voice may charm you when it announces that your friend still lives. The darling sin is hated by the sinner as the means of his damnation, though he loves it as the source of present pleasure; and in proportion as the present and the future world are present to his thoughts and his belief, may his affections vary as to the same object. When, therefore, men profess to look upon that as excellent which in their hearts and lives they treat as hateful, and to regard as evil and abominable that which they are seeking after, and which they delight in, they are not expressing their own feelings, but assenting to the judgment of others. They are measuring the object by a borrowed stand-

ard, while their own is wholly different. And if they are really so far enlightened as to think sincerely that the objects of their passionate attachment are evil, this is only admitting that their own affections are disordered and at variance with reason. It is virtually saying: Such a thing is good to my perceptions, but I know that they are wrong. It is just as if a man's sense of taste should be so vitiated through disease that what is sweet to others, is to him a pungent bitter. He may be convinced by argument and testimony, that according to the natural perceptions of mankind the thing is sweet, and that the bitterness is in his own disordered palate. This may satisfy his reason, but whenever that same object comes in contact with his palate, it will still be bitter, till its qualities are changed, or his organs of taste resume their natural and healthful functions. So the sinner may believe on God's authority or man's, that sin is evil and that holiness is good, but as a matter of affection and of inclination, his corrupted taste will still reject the sweet as bitter and receive the bitter as sweet; his diseased eye will still confound light with darkness, and his lips, whenever they express the feelings of his heart, will continue to call good evil and evil good.

These three forms of expression in the text appear to be significant of one and the same thing. The thought is clothed, first, in literal, and then in metaphorical expressions. To put darkness for light and light for darkness; to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; is nothing more nor less than to call evil good and good evil, or, as the same idea is differently

worded in the margin, to say of evil it is good, and of good it is evil. The character thus drawn is generally applicable to ungodly men. They all put darkness for light and light for darkness. They all put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. They all call evil good and good evil. If the verse be taken merely in this general sense, the woe which it pronounces is a general woe, or declaration of divine displeasure and denunciation of impending wrath against the wicked generally, simply equivalent to that in the third chapter, (verse 11,) "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

Such a declaration, awful as it is, and perfectly in keeping with the uniform tenor of the word of God, would furnish no specific test of character, because it would still leave the question undecided, who it is that chooses evil and rejects the good. But it is very obvious that, in the case before us, the prophet is very far from meaning merely to assert the general liability of sinners to the wrath of God. The text is the fourth in a series of six woes, denounced upon as many outward manifestations of corrupt affection. Under the figure of a vineyard which, though sedulously cultivated, only produced wild grapes, he had represented the ungrateful and unprofitable service of the ancient Israel, explaining the parable and summing up its lessons in the seventh verse: "The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." From this general and sweeping

charge against the nation, he proceeds to an enumeration of particular offences then especially prevailing, but by no means limited to that age or country: and he sets these forth, not as the product of so many evil principles, but as the varied exhibition of that universal and profound corruption which he had just asserted to exist, in general terms.

The first of these specified corruptions is the avaricious and ambitious grasping after great possessions, not merely as a means of luxurious indulgence, but as a distinction and a gratification of pride: "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth," (v. 8.) Is this an obsolete iniquity in our day, and especially in our favoured country, where the rich and poor so often exchange places, and where the children of poor parents can aspire to be the masters of the soil, ay, and stop their ears against the claims of their poor creditors, that they whose inheritance was nothing may lay field to field, and be placed alone in the midst of the earth? "In mine ears, saith the Lord of Hosts, of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair without inhabitant." It was to such that the prophet threatened woe, and to such that the apostle James exclaimed long afterwards: "Behold the hire of your labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." (Jas. 5, 4.)

The next form of iniquity denounced is drunken-

ness: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night till wine inflame them," (v. 11.) Is this too a peculiar vice of ancient times, unknown in modern civilized society, and alas, that I should say it, in the church of God? In this, as in the first case, the description of the crime is followed by its punishment, including not only personal but national calamities, as war, desolation, and captivity. The third sin is that of the presumptuous, blaspheming sinner, who goes on to sin, not that grace may abound, but that God may take vengeance: "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: that say, let him make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come that we may know it," (vs. 18, 19.) Have we no such blasphemers, or at least such tacit challengers of vengeance? Let your eyes, and ears, and memory, and conscience answer.

The fourth form in iniquity is set forth in the text. The fifth is that of overweening confidence in human reason as opposed to God's unerring revelation: "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight;" another marked and hideous feature in the age in which we live. The sixth is drunkenness, considered, not a sin the former case, under the aspect of a personal excess, producing inconsideration and neglect of God, but as a vice of magistrates and rulers, and as leading to oppression and all practical injustice: "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle

strong drink, which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the right of the righteous from him," (vs. 22, 23.) I should blush for my country if compelled to answer to the question, whether such excesses have not been associated even in her borders with official power and official influence; and I must tremble for my country, when I hear the voice of God proclaiming as the consequence of this incestuous connection between vice and power: "Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel," (v. 24.)

This rapid recapitulation of the context I have given for two reasons: 1, to show that in this whole passage, the prophet has reference to species of iniquity familiar to our own time and country; and 2, chiefly to evince, that in the text we have not a mere denunciation of God's wrath upon wickedness in general, but the description of a certain outward form in which the prevailing wickedness betrayed itself. It does not teach us merely that punishment awaits those who choose evil in preference to good, but that an outward mark of those who hate God, and whom God designs to punish, is their confounding moral distinctions in their conversation; calling evil good and good evil, putting darkness for light and light for darkness, putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. As the other symptoms of a general corruption, which are here enumerated, have their counterparts in modern times, and in the world around us, we are war-

ranted in thinking that the analogy holds good in this case also, and that among the surest signs of those who hate God, and whom God abhors, is their habitual, instinctive disposition to call evil good and good evil.

How this is done, I now invite you to consider, not as a theme of abstract speculation, or as a matter of fact in which you feel no individual concern, but as a practical and personal inquiry of the deepest moment, which, as rational and conscientious beings, you are bound to answer each one for himself. And in suggesting this inquiry, I assume that all who hear me are respectful hearers of the gospel, and professed believers in the truth of Christianity; that none of you are wont to call in question any of its fundamental doctrines, much less to carp at the first principles of morals. You admit distinctly the essential difference of right and wrong; the excellence of truth, and the turpitude of falsehood; the superiority of reason and conscience to appetite and passion as the guides of human conduct; you allow the will of God to be a binding rule of action, and the Bible to be a revelation of that will. You grant that it reveals the only method of salvation for a ruined world, and that whatever tends to make it known, and give it practical efficiency, contributes to the happiness and elevation of the human race.

From none of these important doctrines would you perhaps be willing to dissent in terms, and so far you are innocent of calling evil good and good evil. I do not ask you whether by your conduct you are not belying your profession of these principles;

for difficult to answer as the question might be, it would interrupt the train of thought which we have been pursuing. But the question which I ask is this; when one who thus admits in words the great first principles of morals, takes away so much on one hand, and grants so much on the other, as to obliterate the practical distinction between right and wrong; when with one breath he asserts the inviolable sanctity of truth, but with the next breath makes provision for benevolent, professional, jocose, or thoughtless falsehood; when in the abstract he asserts the claims of justice, and the obligation to give every man his own, but in application to specific cases thinks it lawful to enrich himself at other men's expense, or to take advantage of another's weakness, ignorance, or error; when he admits the paramount importance of religious duties in the general, but in detail dissects away the vital parts as superstition, sanctimony, or fanaticism, and leaves a mere abstraction or an outward form behind; when he approves the requisitions of the law and the provisions of the gospel in so far as they apply to other people, but repudiates them as applying to himself; when any one does this, or any part of this, or any thing analogous to this, I ask, whatever his professions or his creed may be, whether he does not virtually, actually, call evil good and good evil.

Again, I ask you, whether he who in the general admits the turpitude of fraud, impurity, intemperance, malignity, and other vicious dispositions with their practical effects, and thus appears to be an advocate for purity of morals, but when insulated cases or

specific acts of vice are made the subject of discussion, treats them all as peccadilloes, inadvertencies, absurdities, indiscretions, or perhaps as virtues modestly disguised; whether he who condemns drunkenness, but clears the drunkard; he who frowns upon fraud, but smiles upon the fashionable swindler or defaulter; he who hates licentiousness, but loves the libertine; is horror-struck at murder, but can fawn upon the duellist and flatter the assassin; I ask, whether he who does all this can be protected by the mere assertion of a few general principles from the fatal charge of calling evil good. And, as the counterpart of this, I ask you whether he who praises and admires all goodness, not embodied in the life of living men or women, but detests it when thus realized in concrete excellence; who praises piety, but blames the pious; who extols benevolence, but doubts the motives of the few who practise it; who honours warm devotion, but laughs the wretched devotee to scorn; in short, who worships virtue as a being in the clouds, but hates her when incarnate in the form of a reproving example; whether he who does all this, does not really and practically call good evil.

And I ask you, lastly, whether he who, in relation to the self-same acts, performed by men of opposite descriptions, has a judgment suited to the case of each, a pillar of fire one way and of cloud the other, but the dark side turned to Israel and the bright to the Egyptians; all compassion to the wilful transgressions of the wicked, and all inexorable sternness to the innocent infirmities of godly men; he who strains at a gnat in the behaviour of the meek and

conscientious Christian, but can swallow a camel in the conduct of the self-indulgent votary of pleasure; he who lauds religion as exhibited in those who give him no uneasiness by their example, but maligns and disparages it when, from its peculiar strength and brightness, it reflects a glare of painful and intolerable light upon his own corruptions;—I ask whether he who does all this, let his maxims of moral philosophy be what they will, does not, to all intents and purposes, incur the woe pronounced on those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Ah, my hearers, these distinctions may at present appear arbitrary, frivolous, or false, and as a necessary consequence, the guilt of confounding them may fade almost to nothing, to a stain so faint upon the conscience as to need no blood of expiation to remove it. In the present darkness of your minds, that stain may even disappear. But methinks I see already the faint glimmer of a light which is to play upon that fatal spot until it glows and sparkles, a deep, indelible, and damning spot. The day is coming when the eye of reason shall no longer find it possible to look at light and darkness as the same; when the moral perceptions, from acute to agony, shall cease forever to confound the sweetness of true holiness with the envenomed gall and wormwood of an evil conscience; and the woe already heard, shall then be seen and felt; seen by the sinner in the writhings of his fellow-sinners, felt more intensely in his own. From that state many will look back and wonder at themselves, and at what they now are do-

ing in despite of reason, conscience, and experience, and with that solemn admonition ringing in their ears, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." From the darkness and the bitterness of that damnation, may we all find deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE END.

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